

IN SUCH A NIGHT



Babette Deutsch

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By BABETTE DEUTSCH

THE story of one night's events at a house-warming party told, successively, from inside the minds of several characters, without a break in the narrative flow. For a time the scene is shown through Leonard's vision, distorted by his hopeless love for Pauline, his hostess; for a time Marshak, a painter, interprets; then Mortimer Gamble, an elderly lawyer, looks on, with sympathy and cynicism. The point of view shifts, and shifts again, each new angle contributing to the story's action.

A crisis arises and the confusion and mental disturbance of the situation release in each of the guests all of the vagrant impulses, the hidden self-contempt and the spiritual terror that is in every one. Caught at a peak of emotional intensity, a dozen lives are silhouetted against a festive background, the implications of each personal drama clearly defined.

Miss Deutsch, a young American writer, best known for her magazine contributions of verse and criticism, is the author of two books of poetry, *Banners*, and *Honey Out of the Rock*, and *A Brittle Heaven*, a first novel, which was published last year.

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In Such a Night

BY

BABETTE DEUTSCH

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To my dear

About the Author

BABETTE DEUTSCH was born and educated in New York City. While she was a sophomore at college she began to write for *The North American Review*, and she has been contributing poems and critical articles to leading periodicals ever since. She was the winner of The Nation Poetry Prize for 1926 from among three thousand contestants. Her work has appeared in a number of anthologies in this country and in England. She is a member of The Poets and P. E. N. clubs.

Miss Deutsch is the author of two volumes of poetry, *Banners* (1919) and *Honey Out of the Rock* (1925). She collaborated with her husband, Avrahm Yarmolinsky, in assembling and translating two anthologies of foreign verse: *Modern Russian Poetry* (1921) and *Contemporary German Poetry* (1922).

Her first novel, *A Brittle Heaven*, appeared in 1926.

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I

Leonard

AS he padded down the hall toward the bathroom he wished that he might always dress, as this evening, in the caress of warm air. Would he hate the morning plunge into unblanketed freshness quite so much, he asked himself, if he were getting up to close the bedroom windows for Pauline? Almost as much, he supposed. Probably Pauline got up first to close the windows for Maxwell. There were people who had a valet to slam—slam!—their sashes for them. He lived for a soft minute in his cousins' Park Avenue apartment. His mind retreated hastily from the thought of being spied upon in the naïve ugliness of his slumbers by his cousins' "man." (But would it be more comfortable, being seen thus by Pauline?) There were other people, he considered, pulling the bathroom shade across the lighted oblong that gave on scrawny backyards and the unclean rear of factories, who had no furnace-man, people who

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lived in cold rooms off tenement hallways, and stuck kindling in a cranky stove to make the water boil. Fully to grasp the experience of his cousins, and his cousins' valet, and the tenement dwellers, and Pauline, and Maxwell, and himself,—Leonard Hogarth,—would help one to know God, he thought, as he turned on the hot-water tap with one hand and stroked his unshaven jaw with the other.

His eyes saw his eyes in the mirror above the wash-basin. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." But that was in Assyria. A bearded Semite, a lion-breasted king. Had those dark fierce men—he saw one with a whip before a cage of naked slaves—resembled their Maker? Was the benign countenance that eventually sat on the shoulders of Khammurabi nearer the Divine stamp than the pale tired face that now confronted him? The mold must have become worn and warped in six thousand years. Mussed glossy brown hair, growing in a peak from a wide white brow; dark eyes, the shoe-button pertness of the pupil relieved by the warm Oporto iris; high knobby cheekbones smoothly upholstered with tawny flesh; the short nose whose wide nos-

Leonard

trils gave the face a slightly foreign cast—"little dark gates of old life": look closely, see veins and a floating thread of black hair within; the full, very red lips under the crisp brown moustache—sensual, one would call them, if it were not for the rebuke of the stubbornly jutting chin, the brooding inquisitive eyes that commanded the whole.

Leonard stared, hating the animality of his face. He would not have minded being a dog or a horse,—alert, candid, dumb,—they had virtues unknown to the human, with his vicious sloth and chattering secretiveness. He was sadly aware that all that man shared with the beasts was his body, which perished, like theirs. Something in the dark spread of his nostrils, in the ripeness of his mouth, tormented him with the thought of death. Animal death. *Animula, vagula*,—little soul, little sheath.

He padded back through the familiar strangeness of the lodging-house hall toward his own room. Shaved, kempt, tasting tooth-paste and smelling the after-odor of soap and powder, his physical self was the swept vestibule inviting the adventure of guests,—as Pauline's new home must

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be at this moment, awaiting him and what others? But until he reached her he must busy himself with the old vexation. And when he saw her, she would provide him with a new one. He drew on his trousers slowly, wondering if his legs were much thinner than Maxwell's, and went back to his metaphysics.

The body was no good. Granted. A little light kindled by the friction of two amatory torsos,—a light soon guttering and snuffed, spilling ashes and stench. Reilluminated, maybe, but without importance to itself. Kill my consciousness, and what is the life of my body worth to me? Kill my body, and what can I make of hardily achieved spiritual experience? "Where," the little Leonard had asked his uncle after the cessation of a bee-sting, "does the hurt go when it isn't?" Where, indeed?

If he were wise, he would finish dressing and not go at all. He would sit in his room and gnaw at his books. It was criminal to be giving the only hours that belonged to him out of the twenty-four to the strangers and half-friends whom he would find at Pauline's house-warming. The glitter of the newly furnished rooms, the tiny contacts with people, would only stain the pure rotundity of the

Leonard

night sky, abstract him from the essential intellectual gymnastic.

He stood before the high-boy, choosing a tie. They drooped, the diverting collection, across the trim wooden tie-rack which she had helped choose for him at Yamanaka's. A universe that could hold Pauline, Mr. Yamanaka, Leonard, and the wood-carver who had wrought his tie-rack, should be explored to the limit. But now, what tie? The choice was to a degree limited by the fact that he was wearing snuff-colored tweeds. He wondered vaguely if Maxwell would formalize the occasion with a tuxedo. Something with an enlivening warmth, and yet the chill of contrasting blue, would be best. But then he would definitely go. Color demanded observers: an approving eye gave it the touch bestowed by the Prince upon the Sleeping Beauty. He slipped the blue-and-orange stripe through a fresh collar, and, slightly twisting his lips, made an effective knot.

Ready.

He gave a quick stare round his room. How different would it look, shared with a wife? Sloth, gourmet, embracer of pillows, devourer of French pastries, who would bind her days and

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nights to yours? Who would content her mind with watching yours peregrinate? Who would strain to answer your ecstasies with ecstasy, and to soothe your egotism with the flattery which marriage invests with sincerity (every wife weaves garlands for ass's ears)? And Pauline had chosen—Maxwell.

As he swung around the corner and past the undertaker's shop his mood curdled in the heat of a sudden self-disgust. He saw himself encoffined. In an anatomical theater his corpus might be of some use—his brain, too, perhaps. Suppose he were to insert an advertisement in *The Times*: "For sale, one perfectly sound body . . ."; the money to go to Pauline for one of her fetching little hats. But unless he put in the word "defunct," it might be taken that he meant to enslave himself. He had his slavery—six hours a day six days a week putting into readable shape the manuscripts his firm thought publishable, five hours a night three nights a week writing as much of truth as he could lay pen to.

But it was better, Leonard considered, as he plunged into the subway, it was better to be born with iron shackles on your wrist than with a silver

Leonard

spoon in your mouth. For some, the silver spoon was attached to a ball and chain. He thought of his uncles—stoop-shouldered, big-bellied, with the need of piling up wealth for which they found such dull uses. What could it do for them but line their stomachs, cover the backs of their wives, soften the voices of their physicians, and shroud with splendid marble the indignity of their dissolution? He thought of his aunts, condemned, by virtue of a soaring income-tax, to spend energies much slenderer than their hips and bosoms upon poisonous and vulgar luxury. He thought of Pauline.

And, as always at that thought, for these past weeks, he was at once quickened and stayed by pain. He loved—and disliked her. He loved her beauty, the moony pallor of her oval face, the thick darkness of her rich hair, the slant of her flat black eyes, the soft pinkness of her mouth where smiles fainted as gracefully as girls might die of love, the tiny mole that punctuated her stubborn chin. He loved her low voice, husky with late hours. He loved shared memories of times that smelled of a salt night-wind and smoking driftwood, times that moved to music as a

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sun-flower to the sun, dusks dropping laughter as a suspended paddle drips lazy brightness. He hated the knowledge that it was just such memories that she shared equally—no, infinitely intensified—with Maxwell, her husband. He hated, only a little less, the thought of her child. He sometimes believed that what he hated most was her ability to give herself, with no apparent division or reserve, to Maxwell or little Jimmy or himself, even to her work. The Pauline who sat in the stuffy law library taking notes in her clipped round chirography had no relation to the Pauline with whom he shopped for Jimmy in snatched noon-hours, just as this Pauline seemed quite ignorant of the one who quarreled with Maxwell with the fury born of love. Would such a quarrel never precipitate her from the arms of her shrewd handsome husband into his own? Could she care, after Maxwell, for a man merely thoughtful, merely decent-looking?—a man who, till now, had not wanted her passionately enough to advantage himself by those quarrels? Could he ever have done so? Wasn't it, now, too late?

He had emerged from the subway. He had marched stridingly down the gray, night-lit streets

Leonard

toward the house whose chill novelty his presence and that of a dozen others, he supposed, was to warm. He had been three times round the block without even looking up at the light in the windows, while he fingered the crooked puzzle of these days. Was he never to go in? Perhaps the solution was up there.

His eyes caught a familiar figure in the half-light of the opposite park. Jacob Marshak, walking as always with a kind of hurried stroll, as though he had too much to do before dawn, and had forgotten what it was because of the color a dead world shed upon the earth.

"Hello, Jacob - *kuck - in - die - Luft!*" called Leonard.

"Hello—hello," said Marshak in a voice radiant as the blue beam of his eyes under the park lamp, as the dimpling cheeks covered with golden stubble. They walked arm in arm. An encounter with Marshak was always an embrace—unless he was sullen, when you must go, wind-bowed, storm-humbled, away from him. Leonard, revived by the sight of this friend, was prepared to find Sibylline utterance in the way Marshak cleared his massive throat.

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“Well?”

“Well. . . . Tell me, old man, what shall we do to be saved?”

“Come to my exhibition to-morrow,” said Marshak, as though it were an answer. Leonard grinned, hugged the painter’s stout arm. Jacob had the supreme vanity of a child. But there was nothing childlike about his pity, which was shed indiscriminately upon everything alive: flies, beasts, plants, men. For a second Leonard felt that Marshak might prove their savior—his—Pauline’s. . . .

Each man must live and die unto himself; there is no Christ. Perhaps Christ had been such a Jew as this, even physically: large and strong, fit to endure the cross, with capable square hands, fingernails square, too, and ragged, not clean. Leonard found himself confusing in his thought the image of the huge blond man striding beside him and the fainter image of the pained, anæmic, Italianate face that he associated with the Messiah of Scripture. Marshak was from the north. . . . Russia? Finland? Leonard was vague. It would take viking shoulders to carry the sins of the world.

Leonard

They moved together up the steps leading to the vestibule of Pauline's newly acquired house. Leonard pushed the button and felt, unexpectedly, a nervous shiver. The door opened on lights and laughter and a vanishing thread of music. Marshak stood waiting for Leonard to go in.

II

Jimmy

MUMMY-MUMMY-MUMMY WHAT
DO I SMELL?

“Do you like it, chickabiddy?”

(good, not flowers good)

YOU HAVE A RED DRESS ON MUMMY WHY DO
YOU HAVE A RED DRESS ON?

“Hands off, darling. Oh-h, I’m not half-dressed. Shall I ever . . .”

DON’T GO OUT MUMMY DON’T GO DON’T
GO

“No, dear, I’m not going. We’re going to have company here. Now do hurry and hop into bed.”

WHY DO YOU HAVE GOLD ON YOUR DRESS
MUMMY? WHY ISN’T IT ALL RED?

“Why? I don’t know. I must finish dressing; my slippers—”

DID THE DRESS COME OFF ON YOUR FACE
MUMMY?

“Whatever do you mean?”

Jimmy

LIKE MY CRAYONS COME OFF ON MY HANDS I
MEAN

"No, funny-boy."

WHY DO YOU RUB YOUR FACE MUMMY?

"Never mind, dear; do let me dress; go find
Martha. Ma-ax—Max! Oh, *Max!*"

(Daddy Daddy steps trompp trompp
trompp Daddy hurts my neck to look at
him so high up Daddy's hair is butter-color

Daddy's mouth is full of teeth, happy-feeling
mouth his cheek is morning-y, no prickle-kiss
now)

"Have a drink?"

"No, thanks. Must finish dressing, and get
him into bed."

"It's good stuff."

I'LL HAVE A DRINK DADDY

"You wouldn't like it, old top: it stings."

I'LL LIKE IT I'LL LIKE IT

"He's beginning early; chip off the old block."

(what chip-off?)

"Up-up-UP you go! Now look down on your
mother!"

(I can touch the ceiling, maybe I'll drop,
maybe I can touch) YI-I-I-I-I!

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"He didn't get a bath to-night, did he?"

"How could he, when Martha just finished the bathroom? Put him down, now. He must be asleep when they come."

WHY MUMMY? I DON'T WANT TO BE ASLEEP
IS LEO COMING? DON'T PUT ME DOWN DADDY
DON'T

"Is Leo coming?"

"Of course."

"He'll crab the party."

"I thought we were done with that."

"Well, you know how I feel about him."

"You talk as though you were afraid of him."

"I am. I shiver when I think about him: life's too short to be bored. . . . Oh, come, Pauline—*pax?*"

"*Pax.*"

(ceilings are nicer than floors to touch high,
white when I grow up I can touch the ceiling
all the time here's Martha I don't want
bed)

"Good-night, snookums."

G'NIGHT

(*nice* red dress makes you feel dancey like
red toy car why don't Mummy wear red *every*

Jimmy

day? her neck is soft—sssoft she never gives me a prickle-kiss like Daddy I don't like prickle-kiss)

"You won't forget to take him up at nine o'clock, Martha?"

"Nä, nä. . . ."

WILL I GET UP FOR THE PARTY MUMMY?

"No, dear, just to go to the bathroom."

(I'll get wide awake then Martha will show me the Party)

WHAT LADIES ARE COMING MUMMY?

"Dozens, darling."

WILL THEY COME TO SEE ME IN THE BATH-ROOM?

"No. Martha, no one is to see him! Mr. Peacock's orders."

BUT I WANT THEM TO I WANT

(Mummy gone Mummy petting all the rooms—not me Martha does what Mummy says Mummy does what Daddy says everybody never does what I say why does everybody never?)

I WANT

"Ssh, ssh . . . all right, all right. . . ."

(the matter is Daddy he wants Mummy

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Martha now Martha: no red dress doesn't
smell so good warm huggy Martha)

"Alle kleine Entchen
Schwimmen auf dem See. . . ."

(bed makes a day stop all gray and hushy
waiting, waiting for something something
like up-near-the-ceiling-feel you wait)

I'M FAST ASLEEP MARTHA

"That's right, you go to sleep. Schlaf wohl."

SCHLA'WOHL (when she's gone I can open my
eyes and listen)

(gray and hushy where's Bambo? *here*
he is hold Bambo tight, and wait now
she's gone Bambo soft nice squdgy he
feels like the rug rubbed a wrong way that
hard thing is his eye like a shoe-button Do
you want to hear the Party Bambo? *Yess* he
says yes he wants to hear the Party)

"The punch is something to lay your tongue to,
Pauline. It's just that dash of anisette—"

"Anisette?"

(Daddy Mummy)

I WANT A DRINK

"Isn't he asleep yet?"

Jimmy

(she'll stay to give me a drink then I can have some more then bubbledy-cold bubbledy-cold bubbledy-cold in the bathroom it's sweet again when she comes close)

"Here."

(don't want must swallow she'll stay while I—)

"Is that all you want?"

NO MORE MORE

(water doesn't taste it's cold but she'll hold the glass on and on and on smells good when she leans, nice never mind bad water if she stays now)

"That's enough, Jimmy."

NO

"Quite enough; cuddle down."

(all gone water all gone Mummy wait listen: Martha-steps klomp-pat klomp-pat

No: company *Company* is it Leo? Leo would come in to see me maybe)

"Charming house . . ." "Just put them on Max's bed." "Why didn't you warn me it was full dress?" "It doesn't matter. You know Max . . ." "Early American, of course." "Have you everything you want? Powder? There are hair-pins in

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that box." "My dear, it's simply sweet, simply" "The little tow-head with the boyish bob, your sister-in-law? Why, she's just a child!" "So I said to him" "The one in gold? Wrote that dreadful Broadway success: Simone Remey, her name is." "He must be asleep now." "You have a *baby*?" "So he said"

(I feel a weewee coming I *can* call, for a
weewee wait till they go then they won't
hear, only Mummy voicey noises, going away
downstairs Call now:)

MUH-MMY! I HAVE A WEEWEE

(listen she didn't hear)

MUMMY!

(not Mummy it's Martha)

I HAVE A WEEWEE

(good, pressed closed to Martha the bath-
room is almost in the party hear Them
white bright big bathroom light shining rinny-
runnyrinny weewee all done all buttoned in

If she would carry me through a other door
I would see All dark now, all away Bed
Bambo hug him tight)

DON'T CLOSE THE DOOR MARTHA DON'T

"Must."

Jimmy

NO DON'T I'M FAST ASLEEP I WON'T WAKE
ME UP AGAIN

"Mummy won't like; I leave a little crack,—
so—"

A BIG CRACK MARTHA

(light light long, thin staying the
light's for Them it won't go out They'll
keep coming and coming Bambo rough-soft
Bambo They're laughing ladies' laughs
mans' laughs go through your bones a good way

I don't hear Mummy where is Mummy?
where is Martha? If I want a drink of
water who will come? Leo? Daddy don't
like Leo why not? I like Leo Mummy
likes Leo Where is Mummy? far away
downstairs far that's light under the door

Bambo Bambo don't answer me every-
thing is different this night voicey noises get
littler maybe they're all going away maybe
Mummy went away That's Them again,
shouting maybe They're angry, like Daddy gets
maybe They're hurting Mummy They're
laughing again far away downstairs loud
loud, that Mummy can't hear me That's
the music-box Mummy can't hear me

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Lonesome light Bambo drink-o'-water
lonesome can't call because of Big Gray
Empty lonesome 'fraid dassn't call
'fraid it's, it's, I want Mummy Creak-
pad, creak-pad *what is it?* creak-pad, creak-
pad It's worser than the Big Gray don't let
IT know I'm here squeeze up tight cover up
don't make a noise not to breathe, not
IT's in the door don't let IT see me, don't
IT's coming in don't let IT IT's coming
to my bed IT IT *IT*

Martha!

"Awake?"

(Martha was IT snuggledy-warm, Martha)

I WANT A DRINK

"Is that all?"

(Water doesn't taste it's cold don't want
water but Martha'll stay Martha'll hold the
glass huggy Martha holding it and her hard
warm hand tight where my fingers touch drippy
glass that's so good good good)

BAMBO WANTS A DRINK TOO

III

Leonard

FELICITY was so simply achieved. Why not rest content with such colored moments, kindling to the eye and suave to the tongue as ripe persimmons? Too many doors opened on gusty darkness. Live in the lighted circle. Eat, drink, and be blessed by the world and the flesh. If the spirit hungers, smother its wails in swansdown—the little princes in the Tower. . . . O ancient ache!

Leonard lounged on a wide stool, the back of his head leaning against the carven arm of a chair that had been pushed to the wall to give the dancers room. Light from flattering sconces and large silk-shaded lamps twinkled again from a bright thinly-leaded mirror, satin-sheathed breasts, gleaming shirt-fronts, and one or two polished egg-shaped unbarbered surfaces solemnly revolving. Dance-music from a massive victrola, dance-music slightly veiled by the advancing surf of

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slipperd feet, by the rustle of talk like the noise of lace-paper being removed from a gargantuan box of confections. He might have known Pauline would offer him this,—Pauline, and Maxwell. Among Max's friends his wife breathed perfume and wine like air, though the atmosphere of her own gatherings was as fresh and salt as sea-weather. Leonard watched her as she now moved across the waxed parquetry with the indolent glitter of a mannequin. The music came between him and his questionings. To hold in your arms such a soft and pliant thing, to plunge with it like a swimmer into gently shuddering tides of orchestrated melancholy, to dream, to die . . . Dancing was death. Surcease from the metaphysical pain. Motion sweet and anesthetic as a gas.

He had somehow risen, somehow taken her into his casual embrace, to glide with her as gently as a balloon tossed upon the billowing meshes of the music. Only as he released her, she came alive, a warm smiling woman, regarding him with the coquetry native to her slightly tilted flat dark eyes. She was an entity, even as he, though at this present moment he must force himself to believe it. If he touched her cheek, which had the tone and

Leonard

seemingly the texture of old ivory, enamelled, she would be sensible of his fingers; her nerves, her brain would respond—was Pauline thinking?—with tremors and interpretations. Hath she not hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passion? Is she not fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as Leonard is? If you prick her, does she not bleed? If you tickle her, does she not laugh? If you poison her, does she not die? And if you wrong her, shall she not revenge?

“Where are you, Leo?”

“In the sixteenth century, on a street in Venice, listening to a Jew named Shakespeare.”

“You mean Shylock!” she made a sound somewhere between a boy’s chuckle and a woman’s laughter. He must hear it again.

But was it possible that Pauline was a manifold, like himself? and not merely a musical instrument, capable of giving forth sweet sounds—a painted statue, that had been taught the trick of kissing? Could she also cry? And bear children?

“I had the folly of hoping I might talk to you. I didn’t want to be sandwiched in between a fat

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jolly partner and an angular solemn one, like a meek slice of ham."

"But you are the solemn one," observed Pauline, "generally."

"And that was why you invited me—to relieve my sobriety, to soften the memory of my angles with the pillow-like comfort of your other swains. I know," said Leonard, his mouth smiling, his eyes grave.

"Dear Leo," said Pauline sweetly, "what a beautiful smile you have!"

"Haven't I?" he answered, with frank vanity. "It is almost as fine as yours."

"Not quite," said Pauline with seriousness.

"No, not quite," he admitted. "Will you match the arts of conversation with me instead?"

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "Your talk is much better than mine. You have so many—adjectives." She meant, rather, that, as hostess, she had too many responsibilities.

"Verbs are the life of a language, my dear," said Leonard, and became aware of a fantastic thickening in his throat: "I love you."

"That isn't a verb—it's a state of mind," she retorted. "And you can love me while we dance."

Leonard

The music was winding on, as though forever. Her swaying body almost drew his arms about it.

"Come."

But he did not come. He allowed her to be carried off by one of the tall designs in black and white which were sliding, to his mind as wooden and blank of will as dominoes, over the polished floor.

I love you . . . a state of mind . . . you can do it while we dance. No, thought Leonard, I can't even hate you while we dance. He was not jealous of Pauline's present partner, because so long as the man was dancing with her, though he held her in his arms, though he breathed the strong sweetness of her perfume and the little teasing odor of her skin, he was merely the obedient creature of the victrola, as—a moment since—Leonard had also been. He did not care with whom Pauline danced, nor how far away. It was another remoteness altogether that troubled him.

His imagination marched out of the heated scintillant room with strides that none regarding him, posed in his corner with folded arms and the unconcentrated stare of blindness, at all surmised. He began walking angrily, rapidly, down the

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years—they were few enough—of Pauline's married life, seeking her. Certainly he was jealous, if a balked vehemence that ended in throbbing nausea was jealousy. The girl he sought was lying passive, even happy, in the clutch of Max's hateful world. He considered, with secret amusement at himself, that he minded Max less in the body than in the spirit. Suppose he admired Max . . . or if Max wanted one attribute of all that enchanted Pauline. . . . Leonard watched him circling, in his clasp a girl like a doll of spun sugar, with one poinsettia flaming against her bare shoulder, Max's tall body in supple attentiveness, his perfect teeth unclosing on a witticism that made his partner shrill gently. . . . Pauline could have crushed that girl as though she were literally spun sugar, but Pauline, caring for Max, must allow him his meed of confections. To-night Pauline herself was quite as brittle, almost as sweet.

It seemed to Leonard, as he watched there, brooding, with the sound and surge of the dancers just beyond him like a wind-ruffled reservoir of magic, that he stood upon the brink, a sullen fisherman, flinging his net in vain for the little golden fish that could, but would not, speak to him. He desired Pauline. But Pauline was possessed by a

Leonard

stranger, by a familiar stranger, who was of her own sex, and wore her own softly curved face under the crisped mass of teak-colored hair. It was as though he had come upon his lady in the very act of Sapphic incest,—as though he beheld her Self embraced by and subdued to, its sister-flesh, and he ran from the horror with the soundless scream of nightmare, even while he observed the wheeling music-ridden maze before him with the absolute patience of the mantel against which he leaned.

Was Pauline ignorant of his torment? He wanted ways to punish her ignorance. He could not do it here. It seemed to him that he could never do it in her presence, because, wherever she was, she moved within a world that was her own defense. That he knew his own Self for maculate, incomplete, that he doubted sometimes its very breath and pulse, did not matter. Pauline moved for him, like a disguised and dishonored Roman girl, among wine-bibbing, jewel-jangling Goths. Ah, and he wanted her to speak not their barbarian syllables, but his own tongue. He, who, so few hours ago, had sat grievously between the twin devils of skepticism and mortality, the one to bind him, the other to flay, was now panting like a

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hopeful runner, strung to the effort of snatching the Pauline he loved from the Pauline he knew.

He watched her coming toward him, her sooty hair loosing grape-tendrils about cheeks rounded like those of Leonardo's St. John, but with the bright pallor of a Donatello madonna, the slant of her eyes accented by a wisp of rouge, the tilt of her soft mouth. Nothing seemed impossible. Futilities were snuffed out like a quivering candle in the clarity before dawn, and strength flushed him like the tidal rose of morning.

"You brought someone with you," she said remindingly.

"Marshak," he admitted. (He must not let his eyes caress her, until she let him save her from herself. Andromeda, chained to the rock of Max's ambitions, and he, Leonard Hogarth, to play Perseus? . . . he smiled with wry distrust.)

"You must find him," said Pauline-Andromeda. "He'll be in the library." She whispered confidently: "You'll be happier there."

"I must find *you* first," muttered Leonard-Perseus.

"Me?" she laughed. She hugged her rock. "Did you never give a party, Leo?"

Leonard

"Not this kind of one," he said, grateful that his voice told nothing of his under-thought.

"Any kind should teach you that the whole duty of hosts is to be everywhere and nowhere. You won't find me to-night."

He faced her, not touching her, his eyes drilling into hers, as though he could get behind, to her brain, as though he could split the jewel-case and snatching his treasure run with it,—where?

(Pauline, Pauline,—don't you see? We could do anything if we were willing—literally *willing*. . . . If you could forget the importances on which Max feeds you. If we could believe in each other's excellence as men believe in the excellence of eight per cent Swiss Confederation bonds! If we could plunge into the days and nights and get the vitals out of them as the poor fools over here were trained to gut the poor fools over there with guns! Why should it sicken you less to live with a spiritual eunuch than to have your man physically impotent?)

He said: "So you ask me to console myself with Marshak? Thanks."

"Oh, I shan't forgive you," she answered, over her shoulder, "if you are consoled."

Was he angrier with himself or with her?—

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and why? She hadn't asked him to pile up crisis as he had, in his dazzled imagination of her capture. She had not asked him to do anything except to come. She had not promised him anything, if he had only known it, except frustration. This was Max's house, these were Max's friends, upstairs slept Max's son.

He took a goldfish-colored glass of liquid from a tray thrust solicitously at him by an aproned girl. It was pretty stuff. And it warmed you.

He heard a thin loud voice: "I WANT A DRINK—" Jimmy. He meant probably that he wanted his mother. We're all alike, Jimmy. Perhaps Marshak, in the library, was lonely, too. Leonard would bring him comfort in a cup. He took another glass from the ambulating tray, and went to seek his Jewish viking. Had the old vikings been lonely, in the interim between battles and discoveries?

As he moved toward the door Max caught his eye.

"*Hel-lo*," said Max. "When did you get here?"

"This minute," returned Leonard. "You've no idea how far one can go in a minute," and he smiled above the glass he was carrying. "Wassail!"

IV

Evelyn Mayne

EVELYN MAYNE sat as obscurely as possible in a corner of the large buff room whose walls were enlivened and made homely by engirdling books. She had given Will a smile of dismissal as he marched, arm in arm with a black-haired girl wearing bayberry green, toward the music across the hall. Evelyn had come to the party because Will was too uxorious to go without her, and too sociable to content himself at home. It was hard enough on a man to have his wife pregnant, she thought, without making him, like the males of some savage tribes, behave as though he were the one burdened with child. Still, she wished he had pleased to come alone. She had a queer feeling of being tabu. She knew that the men would have avoided her if they could. Clever as her loose dark dress might be, and lacking in prudishness as Pauline's friends were, somehow the consciousness of her swollen womb was im-

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mensely present to disturb the vanity of husbands and remind wives of responsibilities they would rather have forgotten.

If one could only escape into a fairy-tale once in a while, how much simpler life would be! The magic carpet that would carry you flying half across the world—back to the lecture-hall in Vienna where she had first seen Will's long lean red-bearded face and the tuft of hair like a thick flame above it; back to the little café, with its paper table-cloth and chipped gay crockery, where they had drunk such delicious coffee and laughed at such silly jokes and made even the pallid waiter smile at the merriment of the "gnädiges Fräulein"; or back to the top deck of the home-bound ship where they had sat in the wide sweep of sun and wind, their businesslike thick books and journals lying ignored beside them, too soothed by the sea-rhythm to study anything—even the problems of life together.

It couldn't be marriage that had made such a difference to them. Though certainly you had to care very much for a man to stand being married to him. Early mornings, before he had washed the dull drowse from his face, days when you wanted

Evelyn Mayne

to talk to an adult and he had turned into a peevish child, nights when you were worn out with all the nagging monotony of marketing and house-cleaning and counting the laundry, and he required a rollicking playmate to chaff and dance with him. Could it be America? They had been gay enough in Europe. They had taken their work seriously, too. He had been proud of having a girl whose thinking was as swift and straight as the smash of her racquet or the flash of her skates. They had been used to meet midway between his clinic and the university, and to wander for hours in the tender twilights of the Prater, or through some chilly impressive gallery; or, choosing a cab-driver because he looked like a living Dürer, they would be jolted slowly over the cobbles, talking endlessly about everything from Lebkuchen to sex-life in children, from Twilight Sleep to Cellini's salt-cellars. And nearly always they agreed, and that was so good. And sometimes they disagreed violently, and that wasn't bad either. Here at home they didn't find an hour for a walk in the park; they hadn't seen the inside of a gallery; and when they talked, it was of whom they ought to invite to dinner, or how they could suppress their

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relatives-in-law, or of the beastly competition there was for women's jobs in psychological laboratories and whether she shouldn't, rather, embark upon the more hazardous and world-without-end work of maternity. Maternity had won. Was she sorry?

She wouldn't really know until her daughter was born. Evelyn had decided on a daughter. Will would be jealous of a son—or he would think he ought to be jealous, which amounted to the same thing. And she herself would be on better terms with a daughter. She was used to sisters. The only man whom she really knew intimately, after all, was Will. If the baby did turn out to be a boy she hoped he wouldn't find out that she was disappointed.

She consoled herself with the reflection that Will, who ought to know, thought it would probably be a girl because its little heart beat so fast. Girls' pulses were hurried. Queer. Women took life, generally, so much more easily,—and weren't so quick at running through it, either. There were more widows than widowers. She didn't like her thoughts, and was glad when she felt the baby waltz gently within her. An athletic child, cer-

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tainly, whatever its sex. It generally moved when there was music. With a proper course of prenatal concerts, who knows how easily babies might get themselves born?

There were plenty who'd been born without that. She looked about her. The library was filled with people, some of whom Evelyn knew, many of whom were strangers. All of them had had mothers. All of them had once danced—as the secret creature was now dancing within her—in a close dark sheltering cavern. These people . . . would her baby grow up into something like them? Of course it would. And she and Will would stand by and applaud their offspring,—with what sort of crack in their hearts, she wondered. The women were the worst. The women who had come billowing up to her all evening, with knowing eyes and protecting smiles. The women who greeted each other, across her, with “How’s your family?” and rewarded her with patronizing curiosity for listening to their chatter. The women who assured her she would come through it like a streak. The women who informed her that the second child was much more of a problem than the first. The women who asked her if she planned to give up

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her work, or apply all her psychology to her own child. The slim, light, tittering, twinkling, feminine things whom she—sitting withdrawn and heavy, still-faced and sober-gowned, in her corner—so self-reproachfully envied.

She wanted to talk to a man. She remembered briefly a scene in the Women's Night Court years ago, when she had visited it with half a dozen fellow students who were majoring in psychology. A prostitute had been brought in by a plain-clothes man for soliciting, and the woman was clinging to the detective's arm with the easy ardors of her trade, crying insanely: "Well, anyway, you're a *man*—ain't you?" Evelyn, wishing she had forgotten that moment forever, felt that she too could cry out to any of the males present: "Well, at least you're a man—aren't you?" It wasn't that she wanted to be admired or caressed,—even Will's touch would have annoyed her. She wanted simply someone who would ignore the physical and mental complications of her present state, and accept her as an individual. As man to man, she thought humorously.

She became conscious suddenly of a stranger's attention drawing her eyes by its pure power to

Evelyn Mayne

eyes that stared, claiming her, from the other side of the room. Lifting her head to meet them, she realized uncomfortably that the tall broad somewhat shabby man whose hard blue gaze held her, as though embraced, over the heads of the other people in the room, was regarding her not as a person at all, but as though she were some inanimate object, to be handled, appraised, set down and probably forgotten. She had seen physicians look at poor patients that way in a clinic. It had irritated her at first, but afterwards she became used to it. But this man with the cool child-like eyes was no doctor. Foreign, by the high cheek-bones and the broad nose. Not Austrian, though, in spite of his blondness. She wondered. But why on earth was he looking at her like that? She had never seemed so ugly to herself as to-night. With an effort she turned her eyes away from him, ashamed because he had not even known she had met his gaze.

She asked herself then why she should mind being looked at as if she were a thing. She was a Thing—an animal contrivance for the perpetuation of her kind, a human incubator. She hadn't used her brains for weeks. She couldn't dance, or ride, or swim. Even walking was difficult at times.

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The baby seemed to stir and stumble again within her body.

Suppose it were going to be born. To-night. And there wasn't time for Will to take her home. And he, the father, would have to play obstetrician—there was no one else here—how he would hate it! She was getting silly. Nothing was going to happen to-night. It wasn't time. And life wasn't like that, anyway. The jazz rising across the corridor—slippery voices jiggling over the sounds from the pompous victrola—the swathes of smoke in the library that stung her eyes—the thick restless discomfort at the center of her body—these were besting her. Evelyn wished she could slip out of her flesh for only a moment. She should have had the strength to insist on Will's coming alone. Where was he now? Still dancing with that green girl? When they got home he would probably be very sweet to her, to cover his disgust for her inadequacy at the party, his anger at himself for that helpless disgust. Poor Will!

Were most husbands like this when babies were under way? Max, for instance? She remembered vaguely unpleasant stories about Max and Pauline,—things Will had said, things she had seemed

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to notice. . . . But here they were giving this party—the new house—little Jimmy snugly upstairs: their child. It wasn't true. She was letting her physical distress get the better of her mind again,—make her think ugly thoughts, stupid, unnecessary.

Will.

His eyes from the doorway asking, "How are you now?" Tenderness, there. Peace, there.

She gave him a reassuring look. He pushed toward her through the crowd.

His hand on her shoulder: "Tired?"

"Oh, I'm all right," she lied, as she knew he expected her to, pretending to himself she wasn't lying—pretending so hard that he ended by believing her.

And there was that staring fellow in the opposite corner. She refused to look like a Madonna for *him*.

"I want you to meet my wife."

A girl Will knew. Not pretty, not well-dressed; clever, probably. Evelyn made room for the girl on the couch, moving awkwardly, with heaviness.

"I know you'll have a lot to say to each other. She's doing vocational guidance, Evey."

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Someone beckoned to him. He was escaping. He hadn't even remembered to tell her the girl's name. Not that it mattered. She followed his retreating smile with an encouragement that was only half pretence. She'd see the evening through. Not be morbid.

If only that funny little dragging pain would stop. She couldn't recall having had it before.

"Do tell me something about *your* work," said the girl. She showed too many teeth when she smiled.

Evelyn considered. Work? She had had work, of course. But now all her effort was bent toward pushing away the nag of that annoying little pain. She licked dry lips.

"I'm—not doing anything, just now," she said.

"Oh, I know," the girl replied, superfluously, with an understanding glance.

You don't know at all, thought Evelyn viciously. I never worked harder than I am this minute, trying to keep still, and keep cool, and pretend I like sitting here and talking to you and being suffocated with cigarette smoke, and fighting a pain and fighting that man over there who wants me to look like a Madonna—I know he does,

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but I can't tell you how I know. The only real thing to me now is my uncontrollable body, and I'm trying to act as though everything else were real, instead: you, and this room full of people, and clothes, and music, and you again. It's work, I tell you!

"Do you happen to know the name of that man standing over in the corner?" Evelyn managed to ask.

"You don't mean Leonard Hogarth?"

"No, talking to him—the big blond one."

"Oh—that's Marshak, Jacob Marshak, the artist. . . . He's so delightful: such a child."

A child—child? If an unborn baby could be so powerful, that giant must be a Hercules . . . the labors of Hercules . . . But he'd never been a woman, pregnant, at a party: what could he know of work? She was letting her mind get away from her again, absurdly.

"Thanks," she said to the strange girl with the teeth.

She wished Will hadn't given her someone to talk to. Everything seemed too difficult. If a miracle could happen, and she could remove herself from this strange house, this strange com-

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pany, from the pressure of voices and shapes and demanding intelligences—if she could be alone with herself, to steady herself . . . If a miracle could happen . . . But I don't believe in them, she told herself sadly. So she sat as quietly as possible, accomplishing the miracle of appearing to be a person when she was really nothing but a living casket of pain.

"What's the joke?" asked the girl with the ready teeth.

Evelyn had smiled to herself at the notion that she was like a bag in which a snappy puppy was hidden,—her pain was the puppy,—nobody must know it was there, that it could bite. . . .

"I was thinking about people in trains with dogs—funny . . ."

"M'h'mm"—the girl gave her a queer look. "Will you excuse me a moment? There's someone over there I haven't seen for ages. . . ."

Evelyn nodded gratefully. It was much better, traveling with a snappy puppy, to be sitting quite alone.

V

Leonard

LEONARD watched Marshak's throat as he swallowed the pinkish stuff. What mindless creatures people seemed when they were eating or drinking. One could go mad in a restaurant watching the steady shuttle-play of jaws, the fists fitted with knives and forks moving up and down in a graceless rhythm. If it were purely mechanical one could bear it. But it was not. Here, over their food, men showed themselves for what, at bottom, they were: guzzling, gobbling animals, stuffing their guts with the tripe of other animals. Sickening, terrifying. Talk now of brotherly love, intellectual traffic, the æsthetic emotion. Talk now of the sacredness of personality. The mouths open, the jaws work, the spittle flows, the throats gulp, the mouths open . . . Easier to watch a tiger at the zoo, leaping to his shelf to lie there voluptuously curling his lips over a chunk of bleeding meat. He made no pretense of being a little lower than the

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angels. Easier to look at dead men, from whose stiff countenances even the embalmer could not wipe the secret look of having possessed a Self. But this . . .

“Have a cigarette?”

“No,” said Marshak, smacking his lips.

Leonard lit one with the attentiveness he always gave to a smoke when his thoughts annoyed him. He felt secretly as though he might burn up his intellectual waste with the same match. Inhaling deeply, he followed Marshak’s stare.

He was looking at a woman seated on a couch across the room. Huge woman. Familiar? Will Mayne’s wife—and having a baby. What was Marshak seeing there? He seemed annoyed.

“Ou sont les madones d’antan?” he asked.

“The Madonnas of yesteryear?” Leonard translated uncomprehendingly. “What do you mean?”

“I was looking at her dress,” said Marshak, who had not ceased his scrutiny of Evelyn Mayne. “It is made to hide the fact that she is to become a mother. As though she were ashamed.”

“Is it something to be proud of—to bring another infant into this over-populated room—world, I mean?”

Leonard

Suppose it were to be born here. Leonard tried to visualize Max's face. Pauline would know how to behave. Who else? How impolite Nature is.

"They thought so once. Look at the old masters, you will see. Those women with the full skirts draped so as to make them look big with child—they had another kind of vanity."

A gallery of medieval portraits ranged itself before Leonard's mind. Jacob was right. Those burgesses with the hair pulled back from their plain faces and their hands folded over their abdomens—what did they look like but homely Madonnas? What were they but fine ladies who had taken for a fashion-plate some image of the Immaculate Virgin?

"If I were a woman . . ." Marshak began.

"Would you want to be?" Leonard inquired, dubiously.

"No!" Marshak shouted, and laughed his rich laugh.

"There's a woman in you, though, Jacob," said Leonard, "or you wouldn't be a painter."

"In every man there is something he never got from his father," Marshak answered. "Das ewig Weibliche . . ."

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"Don't talk. Paint!" Leonard advised his friend. Whatever he had come to Pauline's, to Max's, party for, it wasn't for the sake of the fantasies Jacob could squeeze magically out of tubes onto canvas, but which seemed so absurd when he tried to pour them into words.

Leonard didn't, really, want to listen to anyone. He wanted to snatch Pauline out of this music-ridden phantasmagoria and begin once more to draw the breath of life. Jacob couldn't know that.

But Pauline? She was invisible, in the other room with the dancers, but persistently present to Leonard's fretful imagination: Max's Pauline—the strange, exquisite, horrible Pauline whom Max had created in his own image for this evening. She was circling around in the correct embrace of the puff-eyed men who advised Max on his investments. She was protecting from any harsh draught of thought from the library, where most of her own friends were crowded, the scantily, expensively clothed ladies for whose husbands Max planned advertising campaigns. She was chaffing the worn-looking boys in whose company Max sought the fountain of perpetual youth when she

Leonard

abused his vanity. Could he ever draw near enough to rescue her? Leonard asked himself. Even to signal to her that she was in need of rescue? Was it possible she didn't realize that fact? The girl chained to the rock, waiting to be consumed by the monster.

"Will you do a picture for me some day, Jacob, of a modern Andromeda—and Perseus with the Gorgon-shield?"

Marshak's eyes were vague.

"It must be a handsome rock, you know, and the chains must be of silk, embroidered with little roses in diamonds; and the monster who is coming to devour her must be a creature with a belly so well lined that it would make Jonah in his whale simply green with envy. But allegory has gone out of fashion, hasn't it? This needs a Blake. Couldn't you be a Blake to help me out?" asked Leonard quizzically. It was like biting on an aching tooth to talk this way. The painter wasn't even listening. So much the better.

Then Leonard saw that he had drawn a sketch-book out of his pocket and was preparing to draw. Good Heavens! Is that the way he makes his pictures? But Pauline wasn't in the room—his model

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for Andromeda—and Leonard couldn't say a word or even so unconcerned a fellow as Jacob would understand. . . . What *was* he doing?

Evelyn Mayne!

Marshak lifted his pencil and smiled at Leonard. He cocked his big head in Evelyn's direction.

"My Mary," he said.

Leonard puzzled.

Marshak waved his broad stub-fingered hand at the roomful.

"All these people," he said, "they are so—so—as they are, because they do not know He is going to be born."

"Who?" asked Leonard blankly.

"God," answered Marshak. "It is a picture I have long been thinking of. And now I have it. I was waiting for a Mary. She sits on the couch."

"She's a professional psychologist," said Leonard informatively. He was cross because Marshak had apparently been planning something quite different all the time that Leonard was brooding over his own fantasy.

Marshak simply shrugged. Nothing Leonard could say had any power over him now. He knew

Leonard

what he was looking for. He had found what he wanted.

"What are you going to do with her?" The notion of Will Mayne's wife as the mother of God was perhaps no funnier than what the old Italians and Teutons had made of their contemporaries. Raphael's models may plausibly have been quite as pedestrian women as Evelyn. They were probably, when you thought of it, insufferably vain girls, and awfully spoiled. Certainly their conversation couldn't have been much better than hers. Perhaps some of them were well-to-do virgins who borrowed beautiful babies from the local peasantry to pose with.

"All these people," Marshak repeated, "are so unhappy because they do not know about Him."

"Well?" said Leonard, watching Evelyn, to see if she felt that Jacob was interested in her.

"But Mary," Marshak continued, "she can be quiet, because she knows."

Yes, Leonard decided, Evelyn did feel that warm stare upon her, and it was making her uncomfortable. Why had Mayne brought her in that state? Had Providence directed him to present Jacob with his Madonna? A dull-faced Madonna,

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Leonard thought, with curtains of brown hair hanging straight as a squaw's about her cheeks, her gray eyes cool and empty—or hiding anxiety?

"She sits there," Marshak went on, as though Leonard cared about what he was saying, "like a stone woman, with her hands over her big belly, and her hands are long and white: thin like fine porcelain with a light behind it—the light of Him growing in her big belly."

Leonard was attending now.

"They are all around her, the people, standing on each other's shoulders like jugglers in a vaudeville, and they are very strong, and stupid. And perhaps there is a clown crying."

(I think Max could be that clown.)

"And there is a ballerina: you know some of them break the bones of their feet to dance. . . ."

(Pauline . . .)

"Well, that part I don't see so clear. But Mary—I have found the Mary."

The picture had grown before Leonard as Marshak spoke, and the room altered to the scene he described. It darkened to the harsh flat tones of a wood-cut, and all the men turned to thick-bodied, snout-faced vaudeville artists in a pyramid,

Leonard

and the women—who were fewer—seemed to be wearing tights and had the gaping smiles and O-shaped mouths of tragic or comic masks. He saw Max, who wasn't in the library at all, but was dancing in the room beyond: a long thin body in ballooning trousers, lying prone, one shoulder-blade jerked up in a sobbing angle; he saw Pauline, bent like a Degas dancer over her slipper, every line of her profile taut with pain. Himself he could not see.

For a bare second the painter's vision eclipsed reality. It didn't matter who the Madonna was, so long as Jacob did the thing. But he must put Pauline into it: the ballerina who had purposely broken her foot.

"How long will it take you to do it?"

Marshak shrugged.

"If I had the proper light here . . ."

He went on sketching rapidly. Leonard peered over his shoulder. Even the cartoon would be fine. He wondered what Pauline would think of it, and Max. . . . Max would be pleased at the idea of having an artist at his party. He was ambitious in every way. And he would be flattered at having his party put into a picture. But Max was keen.

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He would be annoyed and hurt by the picture itself. He might pretend it was a joke, a caricature, he might even try to buy it, and frame it, and tell people about it. But he would understand that it was no joke, that Jacob pitied him and pitied Pauline, and pitied the whole laughing, dancing, drinking, secretly miserable lot who had come to warm their new house for them, and who themselves were shivering in the wind of mortal fear. Max would avoid seeing Jacob again.

But Pauline? She would understand, too. She would hate being pitied. Ah, and she would envy the serene woman who was to bring God into this troubled world. The ballerina would be consumed with envy of the Mary. Couldn't Pauline be a Mary, too? Couldn't she be a God-bearer? If she were *his* . . .

Marshak tore the sheet out of his sketch-book and thrust it, grinning, into Leonard's hand.

It was there, roughly, but there, all the same: the crowded strenuous sordid figures, the bedizened athletes, the limelight, the wretched smiling women, the straining muscular paint-daubed men—and in the background, yet throning over them, the placid simple Mary, her beautiful pale hands

Leonard

before her, and the radiance streaming through.

“But—”

Marshak had made Leonard the crying clown!

At that moment there was a disturbance on the other side of the room. Had somebody fainted? He noticed that the air was sultry and sharp with smoke. It was too early for anyone to be drunk. Pauline appeared, her gayety tempered by inquiry and solicitude. Did she need him? Disregarding Marshak, whose picture he still held, Leonard hurried toward her and the mysterious confusion.

VI

Simone Remey

IT was a queer party. Simone Remey,—pleasantly conscious of the way her glittering gown brought out the gold in hair which, thank God! needed no henna wash to make it so; aware, too, that probably no other member of the company had a comedy running on Broadway which was about to enjoy its hundredth performance,—Simone Remey looked about her with a glance that tried not to appear appraising. Connor O'Connell, with whom she had come, was, except for Max, practically the only man she knew here. Con was a nice child, a good fellow. But she did not intend to rely on him for her night's entertainment. There was, of course, Max, too. She caught his eye across the room and smiled at him encouragingly. He must know it was a queer party. Probably his wife's fault. Simone had met Pauline only once before, and had then thought her rather clever. But all these people . . . Circling slowly in

Simone Remey

Con's long strong arms, Simone wondered where Pauline had picked them up, and why she had kept them on. Heavies—that was the only word for them.

But really, weren't most parties queer? Simone found herself reviewing briefly those she had attended this past month.

There was the party Con had given in his "rooms"—Con loved to pretend he was thoroughly English, except for a touch of brogue and a blue Irish glint in his shallow eyes. What an odd lot he had collected in the parlor of the converted private house in little Armenia, where he lived cheaply and badly. Simone had been there early in the morning to clean up for him. Gray rolls of dust under the battered couch. Cigarette stubs. Ashes. Circular stains on the rickety tables. She did her best, satisfying a long repressed housewifely instinct. And for whom? For Con's guests: lonely young "musicians" from half a dozen fresh-water conservatories, a smart stenographer who had been an artist's model, even a couple of chorus-men—pretty, ineffectual boys, who, ignoring the women, had fraternized in a corner from which they sent forth high laughter. Simone, who liked Con for

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his youth, and for the adoration he gave her as a successful playwright, had endured that party because she knew it would be followed by as perfect a dinner as she could pay for, and by Con's equally perfect kisses—in gratitude for the appearance of his goddess before his mere friends.

There was the party at Marya Baratinsky's Long Island villa. Marya, who had been born in Whitechapel and christened Mary Timkins. She had changed her name early in her career to Maria Timorini, and it was a simple matter, when she contracted a marriage with Leo Baratinsky, the conductor of the most expensive cabaret in which she danced, for her to become Marya. Soon thereafter her husband died, and Mary Timkins, who photographed splendidly, went into the movies as Marya Baratinsky, the famous Russian beauty. Simone, who had known Marya as far back as the Timorini days, never ceased to marvel at her. She wondered sometimes whether even Mrs. Timkins, could she revisit the glimpses of the moon under which her daughter moved, would have recognized Molly. The party at Marya's Long Island place had been of a piece with the rôle out of which she never stepped. The nights were given over to

Simone Remey

music and drinking. The music had not been extraordinary, but Marya had swooned so dramatically under its influence that nearly every one had believed it out-Paderewskied Paderewski. The drinks, though strong, had been meager. But Marya had so stroked her brow—alabaster, banded with wide black ropes of hair—had so laughed and staggered and grown husky, that nearly all had entered into the spirit of the scene and acted as though they too had drunk a most potent and regal brew. Breakfast—at which Marya never appeared—had been served just before noon. Shivering a leopard-skin scarf, Marya would stride across her fur rugs to the fire, at tea-time, let the firelight twinkle on her loose rings, thrust a daintily slippered foot toward the fender, offer her vis-à-vis an enormous metal box in which a few cigarettes rolled lonesomely, and lisp, in an accent she had perhaps first picked up from the Russian greenhorns in Whitechapel, a story of a torn gown or a dismissed cook that sounded, in her throaty affected voice, like a tale of lust and blood. Simone believed that Marya lisped even to herself when she swore at a “snake” in her stocking, that she gestured magnificently

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even when, in the marble privacy of her bathroom, she spread tooth-paste on her brush. Simone had enjoyed that party purely because she liked the theater, and Marya's acting seemed to her to surpass anything a whole family of Barrymores could achieve.

There was the party given in Simone's honor by a group of club women who were proud of her because she had stormed the citadel of Broadway—she, a female, single-handed—and entered into possession thereof. Simone had been hard put to it to know how to speak to these strange ladies, who represented what she laughed at and more often envied: wealth, leisure, comfort, sublime ignorance of all that Simone had borne of sordidness and rigor; ladies who had never seen the yellow ring in the bath-tub of a hick-town hotel; who had never postponed an operation because they feared the surgeon's bill, or refused an invitation because they could not afford to reciprocate; ladies who had never been overcome by too much gin or too much love or too much anger. . . . Simone knew very well that every one is human, from the bell-hop to the bank president. It was her sense of that common denominator of humanity that had

Simone Remey

made her Broadway hit. And yet she had been faintly surprised by the humanity of these club women, with their heavily whitewashed arms—like powdered hams, some of them—and their really fine diamonds, and the unconscious condescension of their smiles. They had chaffed each other about their weight, and their age, and their ambitions as regards second husbands (most of them were widows), in a fashion so astonishingly frank as to be childlike. They had praised Simone in terms which even her voracious vanity could not swallow without a grimace. Were they perhaps faintly envious of her, too? She was younger and more attractive than most of them; and if they had accomplished things in the social and political world undreamed of in her hard philosophy, she was, after all, more of a public figure—her name in staring letters on the billboards and in the theater advertisements—than all their solid achievements had made them. Simone, who was generally bored by women, and who had always been impatient of her elders, had still rather enjoyed that party.

Simone observed to Con somewhat abruptly:
“Aren’t all parties queer?”

In Such a Night

And Con, not appreciating the background of her remark, replied vaguely: "Oh, d'you think so, old dear?" and wondered if she needed to be kissed.

The music stopped.

"Thirsty?" asked Con.

"Yes." But she wasn't. Merely, she wanted to be steered toward the group around the punch-bowl. It occurred to her, not for the first time, but with sudden force, that what she really wanted was someone with whom to fall in love. That was what she went to parties for: to look for him. That was why she found them disappointing: he was never there.

She didn't want to be loved. Con cared for her, in his fashion, and if his affection was not of a durable kind, it was graceful while it lasted. She was certain of a sufficient amount of attention—her gold hair, her dressmaker, and her name assured her that. But she could no longer enjoy it. The innocence of her taste was gone. She wanted a thrill she hadn't felt in years. She wanted to be, herself, the lover.

For a brief while, Simone had considered Max. It was sentimental of her, for he looked so much

Simone Remey

the grown-up version of a youth whom she had admired when she had been known to her world, not as a Broadway success, but as the daughter of the baker's widow in Eastport. Max would have been surprised to know that he called up the image of a gangling boy with yellow hair sleeked by a wet brush, and a habit of whistling "The Lone Fish-ball" in moments of stress, which had won for him the reputation of nonchalance.

Simone liked Max's blond handsome face, with the extraordinarily good teeth that he showed when he smiled; his trim physique; his imported ties; his genial severity with waiters; his studied indifference in minor crises; his essential hardness; his comradely taste for tenderloin with mushrooms, dry Martinis, English sporting prints and back-stage gossip. She liked, too, the fact that he had a place in the stable world which was the backdrop for the strip of Bohemian seacoast along which her ship was cruising. Simone wanted the excitement of being in love, but Simone wanted, equally, the reassurance of established things. If one could have both at once . . . But that meant marriage, with its dreary increment of dailiness, and—falling out of love.

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She would marry one day. Next year, perhaps. When she was skirting the edge of middle-age. Marriage was the insurance you paid against the loneliness of the time when even your dressmaker and your masseuse could not help you. But when she married, Simone would choose some very simple person. Not like Max. Why couldn't she, in the interim, allow herself to fall in love with him?

As she stood beside the punch-bowl, scanning the faces of the men about it, she knew why. Max was too much of an actor. And Simone's experience had made her distrustful of the profession. Oh, there were fine men in it. And handsome ones, certainly. And they knew how to move and stand and lounge, how to light a cigarette beautifully, and how, beautifully, to quench it. They knew how to speak—some few of them—with carefully modulated voices, with chosen pauses, they knew how to cough, and when to sigh. Max possessed, in addition to these graces, a mind, where most stage-folk had a vacuum. But even so equipped, he was no candidate for the love of Simone. She could see just what would happen if she let herself go. He would discover it. His vanity would be touched.

Simone Remey

For a little while he would play up to her, oh, as cleverly as though he had been under the direction of a genius. And she, watching him, knowing every trick of gesture and grimace and caress, would begin to play up, too. It would turn into a game, both of them secretly wondering which would tire first. Her excitement would lapse into pretence. Would his pretence then, change into something real? A scornful smile pulled at the corners of Simone's mouth. She oughtn't to choose Max—she ought to choose one of those owlsh-looking men in the library—some yearning bachelor without enough bluff in his make-up to fool a customs official. But were they as owlsh as they appeared? Simone suspected not.

Over the rim of her glass of punch she noticed a tall thin man with a hand on Max's arm—a red-headed man with a short beard. Simone classified red-haired people in two ways: either they were belligerent, hot-headed as their flaming colors announced, or else they were pale, retiring creatures, ashamed of their, generally, snub noses and freckles, and disowning their own brightness as a frightened cock might cluck over his shaking wattles. This man was different. He looked neither in-

In Such a Night

solent nor shy. Simone, setting down her glass, warmed and titillated, was pleased when Max brought him to her side.

"*The* Miss Remey: Simone Remey?" a suave New York voice inquired. Simone was glad that he neither burred his r's like a westerner nor slurred them like a man from the south. She bowed, smiling.

"Will can give you a good time," said Max, "but don't tell him your dreams."

"Oh, I never have them." A psychoanalyst, then. He didn't look the part. Amateur, probably.

"A lady *sans peur et sans désir*," suggested Dr. Mayne flatteringly.

She shook her head—a briefer smile this time. The music streamed toward them, invitingly. She moved toward it, on his arm. Certainly he was attractive.

"*Sans peur*—perhaps," she murmured. Was he married?

They began dancing. (*Sans désir?*)

VII

Leonard

“**YOU** must find Will.” Pauline’s tone was urgent. Leonard saw the struggle between her puckering brows and her mouth, which tried not to straighten into an unhostesslike line. Leonard’s first want was to take the pucker from her forehead.

“Evelyn?” he inquired meaninglessly. It must be Evelyn. Will Mayne would be annoyed. He liked parties. He liked, also, to appear perfect in whatever rôle he essayed. He could not, under the present circumstances, play the part of the perfect guest and the perfect husband.

“Just ask him to come upstairs. It may not be anything. . . .”

Evidently, Pauline thought it might be a good deal.

“You know he *is* a doctor,” murmured Leonard reassuringly. He meant that Mayne wouldn’t have dared to take his wife out if he had expected the

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contingency that loomed in Pauline's worried eyes. As he turned to get hold of the fellow, he heard a suppressed groan from Evelyn, standing in the doorway with averted face. Leonard was touched by a wave of pity that was queerly mixed with scorn. "Mary!" he thought. And yet . . .

Will Mayne would be dancing. Or sitting out with some pretty flapper. Odd, he fell for them so easily and yet he had avoided marrying one. He understood that they wouldn't wear well. Breakfast with a flapper was agreeable enough if it was breakfast after a dance, at five A.M., say—Childs: hot cakes and syrup, black coffee, toast—a merry little flapper with the liveliness of the second wind that fatigue can give. Leonard had on occasion enjoyed that sort of morning in that sort of company himself. But breakfast at the usual hour with the creature—a daily matutinal affair. Yes, Mayne would recognize the impossibility of that.

What troubled Leonard was that whomever Mayne happened to be with, it would be Leonard's duty to take over. Unless he was in the dining-room swapping stories with the men. And that wasn't Mayne's line. If he were dancing, it wouldn't much matter. One girl was like another

Leonard

then—a soft and pliable armful, yielding to the touch, dainty to the nostril, and one needn't look at one's partner if she happened to be homely. But if he were talking—if Leonard would have to interrupt a flirtation with the statement: Your wife needs you . . .

He saw Mayne at last, seated, leaning in an attitude that Leonard interpreted as tender, toward a slim gold-haired woman in a golden gown. Leonard gauged the progress of their intimacy by the fact that the woman noticed him first. She slipped out of Mayne's attention like a hand withdrawing itself smoothly from a caressing glove and turned him over to Leonard with a gentleness that this messenger could not but admire.

Mayne looked up, ruffling his red hair with a gesture of puzzled disappointment.

"Oh-h, Hogarth, old man? . . ."

"Awfully sorry," Leonard said, in a tone that hastily disclaimed any wish to intrude, "but, you see, Evelyn—"

Evelyn's husband was on his feet: "Where?"

"Upstairs, Pauline's with her; it's all right," said Leonard in a kinder voice. And as Mayne turned with troubled apology, just tainted by em-

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barrassment, toward the golden lady, Leonard added, "I'll take care of Miss—"

"Miss Remey," said Mayne, all but over his shoulder, and vanished.

Leonard was left with Miss Remey to care for.

He wondered vaguely about her. Could she, even for a little, take him away from the contemplation of Pauline's descensus Averni? Wasn't her very presence—her shimmering slithering supple hardness—here in Pauline's room, a token of the fact that Pauline had gone over to Max? "Gone over,"—wasn't she his wife? Hadn't she been his wife for four years? Still . . . Leonard was torn between puzzlement and anger and pain.

He must pretend again. Pretend everything was "all right," as he had told Will Mayne; pretend that he was enjoying this strange woman beside whom circumstance had plumped him; pretend that he liked Max's party, liked Max, liked—liked!—Pauline. Did this woman know Mayne was married? Who did she think "Evelyn" was?

"Dr. Mayne's wife isn't very well," Leonard informed Miss Remey.

She nodded comprehendingly. She had not known he was married.

Leonard

"My name is Hogarth," Leonard informed Miss Remey.

She smiled with closed lips, the smile of a woman no longer young but conscious that she is attractive.

"I've seen that name, haven't I?"

"There was an Englishman who wore it once," Leonard informed Miss Remey.

She laughed gently, her chin lifted, so that he could see the long line of her throat. Then she faced him with an accusing smile:

"There's an American who wears it now!"

Leonard grinned assent. Miss Remey had a certain charm. Her hair was real gold, not faked. You could tell by her skin and the sharp blue of her clever eyes. Did she read? Had she read him? Was she, possibly, not Max's acquisition but a friend of Pauline's? What was she thinking behind that quiet white brow; what, under her surface effort to win him, was happening inside of her? Who goes there: friend or enemy?

She laid a hand on his knee. A square emerald glittered. The pointed nails were a bright salmon color. Enemy.

In Such a Night

The hand reached for a paper dangling from his own fingers. Marshak's forgotten cartoon.

"But this is extraordinary!" (Friend?)

He shouldn't have given it to her. It was a betrayal of Pauline to pass this thing around. It was laying himself bare. What rot! No one would understand what Jacob meant, no one who hadn't listened to him. Certainly not this Remey woman, made of gold-foil. Sharply, Leonard recalled that Marshak had drawn him as the crying clown. Oh, what goddamn rot!

"But this is really . . . Are you a painter, too? How wonderful!"

He repressed the need to snatch it from her.

"No—no, I'm not. Couldn't draw an orange. A—a friend of mine . . ." He shut his teeth on his stammerings. Tried again:

"Why d'you like it?"

Miss Remey regarded the sketch reflectively, her head on one side, so that the lamplight shone over her goldenness like Christmas candles.

"I don't quite know. Satirical, lovely—sort of thing you see in *Vanity Fair*—a little like the bit-
ters in a cocktail, eh?"

Oh, Lord. Let's get foxed. All they know is

Leonard

drink, all they want is to forget what they are. Can't she see? . . . No, she can't, and you don't want her to. Give Miss Remey a glass of something: cocktail with plenty of bitters,—vermouth, vermouth, wermuth, wormwood . . .

Miss Remey handed the cartoon back to him. He thrust it hastily into his pocket. He could have crushed it. Where was Jacob's "Mary" now? Was Pauline with her?

Should he dance with this golden girl? ("Golden girls and boys all must, like chimney sweepers, come to dust.") It was a way to make talk unnecessary. But it would not quiet the dialogue within him, the cruel dialogue between body and brain ("What of soul is left, I wonder?"), the clamor of his blood, the sickness of his spirit. This was one of Max's women, a brittle beauty, not quite a fool. The sort of woman who made Pauline jealous. Poor little Pauline. Damn little Pauline! Why didn't she come to him? Break away from all this, this animated drawing out of *Vanity Fair*, leave the house to Miss Remey and Max and Will Mayne . . . Evelyn . . . Evelyn was having a baby. Jimmy . . .

"May I give you a glass of punch?"

In Such a Night

"Thanks, I've had three."

Miss Remey twinkled coldly from the tip of her gold slippers to the top of her gold crimped Greek-knotted hair. She was annoyed with him for having sent Mayne away, or, more probably, for failing to amuse her in his stead.

"Would you rather have a fourth—or dance?"

"Could I dance—after a fourth?" she inquired.

Leonard wondered how much she could stand. It was pretty powerful stuff, for all it looked like pink lemonade. He had only had one. But then he didn't liquor up like Max's crowd. If he did, he might stand them better. Pauline didn't, either. But she— They clinked glasses. Miss Remey wrinkled her nose over hers.

"Anisette," she said at last, decisively.

"Are you happy when you're lit?" he asked, covering his sullenness with a smile.

Miss Remey took another sip before she replied. Another sip, and another longish look at him from her very blue eyes. He noticed the faint net of wrinkles at the corners of them.

"I haven't been happy," she confessed softly, "since the last time I was in love."

Leonard thought savagely: "You were never in

Leonard

love; you can't be in love and happy, you fool." He took a great gulp, to down his pointless anger. His gullet grew warm. His fingers began to tingle. Cheer flowed quietly through him.

"Between love and drunkenness the difference is—what?"

Miss Remey sighed, she sipped, she smiled.

"The one leaves you with a headache, the other with a heartache."

"You're quoting," he accused her.

She nodded: "But only from myself. No infringement of copyright."

It was borne in upon Leonard that she was Somebody. Miss Remey?—Remey?

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"A woman—let it go at that."

She was trying to get him. He disliked her. But perhaps, poor thing, she was pretending to herself that he was someone else, the man who had made her happy, God knows when, the man she'd been in love with. She leaned against him so that he smelt her hair and the different scents in her powder and her perfume—a tangled whiff of alcohol, sandalwood, talcum and anisette. He might have

In Such a Night

kissed her. No one would have cared. Would anyone have been eased thereby? He didn't.

She leaned away from him, golden, distant, smiling. She crossed her long slim legs under the gold gown. She lifted the gold mesh bag at her wrist and, snapping open a cigarette case, offered it, the gold tips toward him. She had a Dunhill lighter of lavender leather.

"Max is a wonder," she said, "for bringing people together. I had no idea anyone like you would be here. He takes care of my publicity," she volunteered.

"Oh?"

Simone Remey. The name leapt at him. "The Lady and the Tiger." He hadn't seen it. Every one had warned him against it. She was making piles of money out of it.

"How does it feel to be a roaring success?" he asked her.

"As if you didn't know!"

"Oh!" he disclaimed all knowledge. Success. Nothing succeeds like success. A successful man, Maxwell Peacock. A successful marriage, Pauline's. No, he didn't know it, didn't want it. Could a Simone Remey understand that?

Leonard

"I," said Leonard proudly, "I'm a failure."

And then misery swept him. If he were to fail, finally, with Pauline? He couldn't bear it. He must find her. Let the Remey and Evelyn go to the devil.

"Shall we dance?" he asked her, rising.

She rose, graciously, and filled his arm.

VIII

Martha

MARTHA opened the creaky door carefully, and padded over to the corner where the crib stood bulky in the half-dark. A hump of bed-clothes moved huddlingly. Was he asleep, or just making believe?

"Awake?" she muttered.

"I want a drink." His voice came with a breathless hurting quaver.

Martha was tired but excited. It was a kind of comfort to be here by the crib a minute, in the usual dull twilight, to let down the bar of the crib with the usual hard grating sound, to bend over the rounded huddle, squeeze the warm tender body that squirmed contentedly in her arm, whisper in a half anxious, half resentful voice:

"Is that all?"

As she bent over him, holding the wet glass while he swallowed, she thought suddenly of Hanschen. He must be almost as big as this, now.

Martha

If she were home, she would be taking care of Hanschen. It would be like taking care of Jimmy, but nicer. Much nicer. Jimmy lifted a slow arm to her neck. His cheek was soft against hers.

"M-Martha." His small voice came clear as a tiny patch of moonlight to startle the sleepy room.

Hanschen hadn't been talking yet when she left him. She leaned closer to Jimmy, forgetting him, vaguely confusing him with Hanschen, wishing she could press him to her so when she was uncorseted, in her nightgown, have the feel of his plump hot body on her own. Mrs. Peacock could do that. And she wouldn't even have him in bed with her mornings. Ts-ts, clucked Martha's reproachful tongue.

As she slowly pulled up the noisy bar she thought he was already asleep. She took the glass of water—nearly full still—to the bathroom, and emptied it behind the closed door so that the company would not hear anything. When she came out she stood a moment at Jimmy's door, listening to the peacefulness of him. He yawned. She would have liked to sniff at him then, the pink O of his mouth gaping milky-mild in her face. Martha yawned, too.

In Such a Night

She couldn't go to bed now. She must go down to the kitchen and take out a fresh lot of sandwiches from the damp napkins. She must wash the empty punch glasses she had collected and take them out again. They liked the punch, this company. Martha would have a glass before she went to bed. It must be awfully strong. She would like beer better. Sandwiches. She must remember the names for them when she passed them around: cheese—yes; chicken—yes, but there was another—what was it? Ach, *caviar*!

She ran down the kitchen stairs muttering "Caviar—caviar—caviar,"—hearing the music, liking the voices and lights that gayed up the house. A lot of work, parties, but nice. Anna was always telling her she would have a better job with an old couple: no fuss, no fancy cooking, just keep things clean, and every night out. Martha rinsed quickly, with sudsy hands. Clara said so, too. Clara wanted to go into a factory. When you're done, you're done; every night out and all day Sunday—sleep till twelve! Clara's Friend didn't like factory work for her: Clara must keep her place. Martha's feet ached from running and standing around. She was beginning to be sleepy.

Martha

The lint from the new towels stuck to the glasses. She rubbed her eyes with the back of her bared arm. If you work in a factory, you must pay room rent. With old people, no Jimmy, and every day alike. And they would be sick; old people always get sick.

The music jiggled thinly from above stairs, filtered through walls and ceilings. Dances were nice. Next week there would be one at the Verein. One more glass, and then done. Anna's cousin was coming on the next steamer from Hamburg—maybe he would be here in time for the dance? If only she had a Friend, like Clara, she would go with him for a year, for more. You don't have to get married right away. Out every night, you meet men—you find a Friend.

Martha felt the sandwiches anxiously: fresh, not damp, that's right. Mrs. Peacock wanted everything just so. Such a small *Aufwartung*: cake and punch and sandwiches (cheese—chicken—?????? *caviar*). Martha would have had more, something to eat, and good beer, something really to eat. Anna would laugh at her, say: "What do you want to make more work for yourself?" Well. . . .

In Such a Night

"Martha!"

Mrs. Peacock! Maybe she had forgotten something. Everything must be just so.

"One moment, Martha." Not angry, but something wrong.

"Yes, ma'am." Martha ran up the stairs, thinking: Jimmy sick? More sandwiches wanted? A rat?—but not in a new house like this. . . .

"Martha, Mrs. Mayne isn't very well. She's lying down in my room. Will you stay with her in case she wants anything, while I—"

"Yes, ma'am," said Martha, obediently. (But the sandwiches, the clean glasses?)

"Right in my bedroom, Martha," said Mrs. Peacock, softly urgent.

Martha ran up the next flight and paused at the closed door of Mrs. Peacock's room. When she had told Clara, giggling, how Mrs. Peacock had one bedroom and Mr. Peacock another, Clara had called her a greenie. Martha was glad nothing was wrong with Jimmy. Had the lady had too much punch?

Martha knocked lightly and was startled when a strange man with red hair and beard opened to her. The doctor?

Martha

"I wonder—" the man began, and then, as a gust of laughter swept up from below, said almost roughly, "Please come in."

Martha came in. A large woman with short brown hair was lying on Mrs. Peacock's bed. She was all dressed, and covered with Mrs. Peacock's old kimono. She was moaning. It was only a moment before Martha saw what was the matter with her. How terrible!

"I have to telephone," said the red-haired man. "Can you take care of Mrs. Mayne for a minute, my girl?"

"Yes, sir," murmured Martha. She was frightened. She had never seen anybody like this but Lilli. And then she had been mostly in the kitchen. She had heard more than she saw. Ach, poor Lilli had screamed! The lady wasn't screaming, anyway, not yet.

The red-haired man went over to the bed and touched the lady's hand.

"I'm going to telephone, Evey dear. You'll be all right? Pauline's maid is here; she'll stay with you until I come back."

The lady said something Martha didn't hear. And the red-haired man smiled painfully at

In Such a Night

Martha, and went out, closing the door firmly behind him.

Martha was left alone with the lady.

The lady breathed heavily and moaned. Martha went and stood close to the bed. Poor thing. Lilli had had ropes to pull at. In Martha's nose was a mixed smell of steam and flannel and coffee, the smell in which poor Lilli had labored. All the holy pictures had been pinned to the red bed-curtains. And yet Lilli had died.

"Don't mind," moaned the lady, "if—I—make a noise. Don't mind."

"Nä, nä," said Martha, soothingly. "Please scream, please. . . ."

And she had been so careful not to let the company hear her in the bathroom with Jimmy. What if they heard the lady? Maybe Jimmy would wake up.

"Scream, just scream," she said kindly.

It was only beginning; the red-haired man would soon come; it was worse for the poor lady.

"Scream." So her mother had talked to Lilli.

The lady was rich. She could have people to take care of her afterwards, and if she was worried any time about the baby, the doctor would

Martha

come right away. She must wear chiffon night-gowns, like Mrs. Peacock. But now, it didn't help, the money and the chiffon gowns. There was nothing for Martha to do. Her mother might have done something. Martha felt lonely and small, threatened—as she had felt long ago when she had been lost and darkness was gathering on the edge of the woods, the woods where there were bears and ghosts, and nobody to call to.

To do something, anything, she straightened Mrs. Peacock's old kimono as it fell over the bedside.

There *had* been something for her to do. Before Mrs. Peacock called her. Something she had to remember. . . . She thought of the plate of sandwiches, the thin rounds of bread covered with black paste. Caviar. Maybe Mrs. Peacock had found them ready, waiting, in the kitchen, and the clean glasses.

"Oo-oo—oh-gh!" cried the lady on the bed.

Someone knocked, and the lady forced her handkerchief into her mouth and waved her other hand. The door opened to let in the red-haired man.

In Such a Night

"That's better!" he said in a cheerful-sounding voice.

Martha was relieved to see him. But it seemed a long time before he noticed her. Then at last she was allowed to go.

It was terrible.

She thought confusedly of Jimmy and the punch glasses and the hours that poor Lilli had labored and what the company might have heard when the door opened and of what Mrs. Peacock would want her to do next. Blindly she ran down the stairs and passed through the hall. The sound of the victrola and the voices of the company comforted and roused her, numbed by the moments in the bedroom. She was on the lower stairs before she saw that her way was blocked by two people who stood talking on the landing. Could she squeeze past safely? If it were just Mrs. Peacock . . .

It was Mrs. Peacock and a man. Martha went down two steps more. The man, she saw then, was Mr. Peacock. He was scowling. His words reached her in a harsh furious whisper:

"He can get an ambulance. Everybody'll know it in a minute. . . ."

Martha

"But, Max, listen, you can't . . ."

"What can't I? Good Lord, Pauline, you can go too far. . . ."

Martha saw that Mr. Peacock had seen her. She should have gone into Jimmy's room instead of rushing downstairs this way. She should have stopped in the dining-room beside the serving-table. His scowl unknotted itself partly and his lips opened in a smile. He was uglier than if he had gone on frowning. His smile scared her.

"Come right down, Martha," he said.

She slipped past the two of them quickly, trying not to look at either, as though that would keep her from being seen, and then they wouldn't know that she had caught them.

Once escaped into the kitchen she felt tears warm in her eyes. She didn't know what was the matter with her. She wished she had something to cuddle to her,—Jimmy wouldn't be the right one now,—little Hanschen. Or if, like Clara, she had a Friend, big and laughing, with strong arms to rest in and a coat that smelled of cigars. At home there had been Fritz. But he was only a boy. Martha wanted a man, big and hard, to hold her tight and laugh at her. But maybe he would end

In Such a Night

by turning into someone like Mr. Peacock. Or maybe you would have pains like the lady upstairs, like poor Lilli. Lilli in her grave, and Hanschen running about, with only his grandmother to mind him, and Martha far away, in America. Ach, Gott. . . .

Martha rubbed her wet eyes with the back of her hand. And put the sandwich plate on the tray with the glasses. And wondered when it would be safe for her to carry it up the stairs.

IX

Leonard

LEONARD considered: whom could he present to Miss Remey, in order himself to effect a decent escape? Escape—whither? He could not guess. But if it were only to stand for a still moment on a dark stair-landing . . . no stair-landing would be dark in Max's house on this night. He doubted if the place would afford refuge for that which was struggling to enter it from the safe seclusion of the maternal body. How, then, should it give Leonard Hogarth a corner in which to possess his soul in peace?

"A penny for them," Miss Remey murmured challengingly. They were standing together, waiting for another record to be put on. Leonard wished he had not been too sorry to fasten upon his face the necessary mask of good-humor.

"Oh, they're hardly worth that," he answered. What had he been thinking? Nothing. What flowed through your mind was so seldom thought;

In Such a Night

rather, notations of emotional states, mere hieroglyphs of sensation and vague desire. Now he wished that the music would commence again, so that they might go on dancing. He wasn't expected to talk seriously to this gilded lily. He hated every woman who was not Pauline. But the Remey faced him down with soft-voiced, imperious curiosity.

"Oh, well," he confessed, "say that I was meditating on the flight into Egypt."

His glance flickered over the men, choosing and rejecting Miss Remey's possible partners. Too many were preoccupied with women: the red satin—the crocus-colored silk—the jade velvet . . . The lovely sheen of the gowns diverted him from the black-coated figures, lean or stocky, the wagging heads, sandy-haired or bald, that played foil to them. Once he caught a man staring with interest at Miss Remey, as though he had just learned who she was, and been impressed by it. But immediately a girl with black bobbed hair and a silver-green dress swam up to him and laid a possessive hand on his arm. Over in the corner there was wild laughter. A thin, slightly swaggering fellow swung away from the group, making toward Leonard. Leonard recognized him for

Leonard

Tommy Lucas, the pianist. Perhaps he . . . Then he saw that what twisted Lucas's long white face was fury.

"If you w-w-want to s-s-sp-spit at m-m-me, then wh-why d-do you ask me to y-y-your d-d-damn p-party!" he stammered. And Leonard saw that he also was drunk.

"Oh, be a sport, Tommy," a man's voice shouted after him, "you know it was a mistake."

"Nobody here'd be fool enough to put ashes in a good glass of punch on purpose."

"Have another!"

Lucas gave Leonard a pale scowl.

"Think I'm too d-drunk to know the difference," he stuttered. Then he noticed Simone Remey. "Damn party," he observed to her with a sweet smile.

It is, Leonard assented deeply, in silence.

"Canned music," said Tommy, kicking at the victrola and missing it. Then, through the doorway, he vanished.

"Do you know Lucas?" Simone inquired.

Leonard nodded briefly:

"The only time he's safe is when he's on a piano-stool." Was anyone "safe" ever?

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She nodded her gold head in sympathetic agreement.

"I know. Did you hear about the time he broke his leg? Doing the Charleston! So pitifully humorous!"

The eyes of the group in the corner, following Tommy's exit, had seen him stop before Simone. Someone knew her. There was a buzz of recognition. As the next record began whirring under the needle, Leonard found himself shut away from her by black sleeves and shoulders. In the arms of her new partner, she waved him dismissal with her emerald and a flash of salmon-colored nails. He smiled, warmed with relief, and turned slowly to the door through which Lucas had disappeared.

Where was Pauline? A need of her obsessed him. He felt as though only to be near her, only to see her soft oval face and the worried brows raised over the dark tilted eyes, would give him the comforting sense of living in a real world, from which he was now divided by something more solid than time, more desolating than space.

He cursed Will Mayne for bringing his wife here, only to thrust her upon Pauline. He cursed Evelyn for acquiescing in Mayne's wish to have

Leonard

her with him. He cursed himself for not forcibly carrying Pauline out of this glittering giddy house, away from Max's queer mixed party, from Evelyn's inappropriate difficulty—to make her share the refined simplicities of an existence that had too long denied her claim on it.

Someone was running rapidly downstairs. Pauline? No, he saw with disappointment, only the maid. He noted the chic gray dress, the tiny apron. A uniform that compromised with Max's too expensive desire for a butler. Pauline would have shopped for it. Leonard visualized her communing brightly, a trifle distantly, with the sales-girl, that vestal virgin serving in some huge lustrous modern temple of marble and precious woods and flattering lights, unimaginatively called a "department store." The new religion.

He paused at the door of the dining-room.

It held the overflow from the drawing-room where the dancers were, and the library, where were assembled Pauline's friends and his own; not, he felt, Max's. The crowd sitting and standing around the oval dining-table was entirely male. There were few men he recognized, but, on the other hand, these faces didn't at once drive

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him off, like the goat-lipped or girl-cheeked or horny-eyed faces of the men who shared Max's tastes, if not his intelligence; who assured Max's financial status, if not his peace of mind. Leonard went in to this group as he might have plunged down a strange street in an effort to get away from a beggar whose importunities he could neither satisfy nor resist—the beggar being himself.

The smoky air made his eyes and throat smart. It took him a moment to see that the man who was drunkenly holding attention at the far end of the room was Tommy Lucas. Tommy, as Leonard remembered, passed through three stages of intoxication. In the first he was demonstratively affectionate. In the second he was belligerent. In the third he turned whatever unlikely corner might hold him into a confessional. He had now reached this final stage.

"I tell you," he was crying, while he swayed back and forth, with long large hands clinging to the back of a rush-bottomed chair, "I t-tell you I'm rotten. Stink in my own nose. They put—they pp-pp-put ashes in my glass inside. If they had any—any sense they wouldn't do that. They'd turn me into ashes like you llllynch a nig-nig-nig-

Leonard

ger. You think I'm drunk, don't you? Don't you think I'm drunk? Thank God I'm drunk! I'm only honest when I'm like—like this."

A line from an unwritten poem sang in Leonard's head: "And Truth, with vine-leaves in her hair . . ."

"Tell you what I did," Lucas insisted. "Tell you the rottenest thing I did." He looked round his audience. He had an audience now. He pointed a hypnotic finger at a square-faced gray-haired man with a pince-nez seated at the table. "You tell too," said Lucas. And then with a sweep of his long arm: "You'll all tell. You'll all tell—rottenest thing y'ver did."

The gray-haired man cleared his throat. The room was covertly attentive. They were grateful because they hoped this man would give them something that would make their self-knowledge less horrible to them. And there was a thin current of hatred, too.

Leonard crouched back in a cave of writhing memories. Cad coward fool fool.

The long wide street that led to his Berlin pension. A shivering sky. Scattered figures, withdrawn, waiting alms they were too respectable to

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ask. One patched young veteran always shaking with the ague of war. On the corner, as usual, the blind woman. Leonard avoiding her, as usual: she was blind, she had too much the air of a professional. And then in the stabbing wind turning back to give her something. A scrap of paper money, a week old, worthless now, all his purse yielded. Could she put it with a thousand other such scraps and buy a bun? She wouldn't see it. He should have thrown it away last week. Her cold fumbling fingers—both hands—snatching it, her hoarse blessing . . . Next day looking for her on the old beat, ready to give her a fiver if he could only find her, but she was gone. He never saw her again. He kept thinking she'd hanged herself.

His mind shuddered away from that. But there was no straw of comfort for him to seize now.

That girl—what was her name? Ellen? Helen? A small dark thing she was, with flat Greek features, plump; Muriel Vorse's best friend. A good foil for Muriel's blonde green-eyed slimness. Leonard hadn't cared for this Helen. He had cared for Muriel. But Helen had liked him. And he had not discouraged her. He could have stopped it all so easily. He hadn't. He remembered her

Leonard

feverish fingers in his hand while they danced together. He remembered her small round swarthy face lifted up to his. Kisses. Kisses of compassion on his part. Of pitiless pity. She had offered him her virginity. He had refused. Jealous, she had taunted him with Muriel. He had stood a moment, helpless, trying to find words that would spare Muriel and keep Helen bound to him as before, words that would leave him free and on his pinnacle. Helen's dark flushed face, her short-breathed fury, Leonard quickly leaning to stop her mouth with kisses because he could find no words. The pain that played through his body. The shame. She had married soon after. He had met her once on the street with her husband, a homely fellow. The bitter stare she had given him with the smile of introduction. As if he had pushed her into those distasteful arms. His fault? How? The fault of his boyish hunger for love, unwanted love even. Vanity, rather. The shame.

Forget her.

Another memory swims up to scare him with an image that fills him with self-loathing. That time when he and Oscar Brissenden had chummed with Dicky Vail. The tall house on the East side,

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crammed with Dicky's mother's "good things," all frightfully expensive and ostentatious and fighting with one another for prominence. Dicky's mother herself, expensive and ostentatious, coming home every night with another strange man of the sort that drove Dicky wild. Mrs. Vail found one morning crouched in her lace nightgown on the floor in the attitude of one hiding something. The something was a puddle of blood. The coroner had called it apoplexy. Dicky knew better. Dicky, the lively sardonic Dicky, sitting like a plaster martyr with icy fingers in one corner of the Vail dining-room. Leonard, unable to bear this Dicky, and the clatter of his unspoken thoughts, running away, on some trivial pretext, to tramp endless streets; while Oscar Brissenden, upstairs, scrubbed rusty blood-stains from the rug in the room where Mrs. Vail would never take a smooth stranger again. That was Briss. And that was me, thought Leonard ungrammatically, sick with disgust for his own weakness.

It hadn't seemed treachery at the moment when he had given the blind beggar the worthless money, nor even all the time that he was feeding his vanity on the worship of his friend's friend, nor

Leonard

when he had left Briss on his thin knees beside the soapy pail in the horror of that hushed bedroom. Only later had the sense of his meaningless cruelty and cowardice swept down over him, steeping him in shame. He would forget these ancient episodes for years at a time. Then something—a word, an odor—would come to stir up the old ghosts. There was a flutter of Erinnys.

Better to believe in the devil, the compulsion of an external incarnate wickedness. But to house the devil in one's own flesh, one's own self permanently tainted . . .

He wasn't bad, as men go. He'd respected, so far anyway, at least five of the commandments. A good proportion. He'd never left a woman with child. He'd never made another man poor to make himself rich. He'd sacrificed, not too gloomily (and not too often), comfort, pleasure, even the sacred hours at his desk, for people he didn't care about. And yet there wasn't a year of his life that hadn't left a sore spot in his memory that he feared to touch.

He came out of his evil dream to see a small, dark, sallow, beak-nosed man, seated opposite, striking his crisp bright shirt-front with a bony

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fist. His black eyes were set, his very red lips curved sardonically. Leonard did not understand the gesture, but his own mood made it seem obvious for a man to beat his breast. The gray-haired man was polishing his pince-nez rapidly and talking politics, covering a confession Leonard had missed with a mound of loud quick busy words. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. No one can forgive another knowledge of him. Lucas was a misanthrope because he made all men privy to himself.

Swathes of smoke and wine-fumes were sandpapering Leonard's mucous membrane. He was assaulted by the presence of the conflicting vanities and hatreds and shames of the men around him. It was as if Tommy Lucas, in a fit of drunken potency, had galvanized into action a soulless monster, created, like Frankenstein's, out of human waste, and capable only of destruction. A monster that clamored for sympathy and was answered with horror. Leonard felt he must get away from here.

The night was large enough to hide his face in.

Leonard

If he were out of the city. The stars would be a blinding spangle. The wide gray flats, the darkly humped undergrowth, would poultice him with their absence of color. Here he would be bitten by jagged lights, the electric juggle of the advertisements would buzz in his eyeballs like monstrously flaring gadflies. The river? The riverside paths eternally haunted by sailor-shadows glued to the shadows of female anonyms.

And Pauline? Could he snatch her out of this and live bravely with her in an honest world yet? For this corruptible must put on incorruption. . . .

The figure of a woman briefly silhouetted in the doorway—a searching pose, a flying grace: Pauline? Take thy beak from out my heart and take thy form from off my door.

Leonard turned to follow. Quoth the Raven—

X

Jacob Marshak

MARSHAK stood with his back against one wall of the Peacocks' dining-room, seeing, not Tommy Lucas, peevishly imperious at the farther end, but his imagined "Mary." He was wondering if he could get the original to pose for him. She had come to this party: she could make the effort to come to his studio. He hardly heard Tommy's drunken insistence: "You'll all tell—rottenest thing y'ever did. . . ." He was thinking of his picture. It was hard to draw a pregnant woman. He had tried it, five years ago, before his own little David was born. A failure. But he'd learned a lot since then. The great thing in this canvas would be the quality of the light—if he could get that! The concentration, without the warmth, of a Rembrandt.

The light here was diffused, uninteresting. There was no design in the grouped figures. "Design." He thought suddenly, with a grin, of his

Jacob Marshak

"Adam and Eve." He had wanted to rent his New York flat while he wintered in Paris, and there had been just one chance of disposing of it to a round little, dull little, bourgeois couple, who would have been unwilling to live with most of his pictures. The blunt nakedness of the "Adam and Eve" would have sent them scurrying off without a glance behind. No use removing the painting; the pair would have scorned the bald distemper of Marshak's walls. So before they arrived he simply took his canvas and hung it upside down. And the couple came and stared and marveled, and talked "abstract design," and paid a deposit on the rent with the air of taking a diploma in sophistication. Marshak chortled, remembering.

The feel of his own laugh in his throat roused him to the scene before him. The smoky room was bespelled by a square-faced, gray-headed man with a pince-nez who had accepted Tommy's challenge to tell the meanest thing he ever did. He was bringing his confession to a close in a harsh, self-defensive voice:

"So I told him to get out with her. I didn't care that he was my own brother. He said if he went, I'd never see either of them again. But I was

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through. I had my own way to make. But I couldn't resist a wisecrack, mad as I was. I said to him, 'You can't eat your cake and keep it too, and you can't marry your tart and keep her too.' Pretty good, what?"

There were hoarse condoning chuckles. The square-faced man cleaned his pince-nez and cleared his throat. He was ashamed. Someone asked:

"What Frenchman was it, said: 'The only morality in love is hygiene'?"

Marshak stood quiet and lonely. The joke seemed to him a stupid joke. He wished himself well out of this ugly room. Before him, on the table, was a half-filled glass of Scotch. "Still life." There was no such thing. Not one of the satyr-faces was more alive than that motionless glass, with its intersecting triangles of rich color, its points of light, its thick slices of shadow.

Marshak, glancing up, observed across the table a small, dark, sallow, beak-nosed man who was striking his crisp bright shirt-front with a bony fist. The man's black eyes were set, his very red lips curved sardonically. It was a gesture that Marshak knew.

It drew him back, like a rune, into the odors

Jacob Marshak

and the shadows that were knitted into the texture of a childhood in the Berdichev ghetto. The day of Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement. He is a boy again, tired and dizzy with fasting, his throat dry as paper, a boy smothered by the crowded blazing synagogue. His body is feather-light: it floats on the close air, lifted on the swaying chant of the crowd, on the voices of people who seem no longer his house-mates and familiars, but mere bowing, muttering, blobs of mortality. An old man faints. The boy feels airy and heavy, like a ton of balloons. The sing-song prayers go on endlessly. He would give anything for a drink of water. He can push the image of food away from him but the torment of his thirst will not let him go: he tries to swallow again and again—there is nothing to swallow. Light from the countless candles, sunken now to tortuous shapes, dances shakily in his head. A sobbing comes from the women's quarter. He remembers that they are praying because they have sinned; because they fear to die within the year, and they are black with sins. Suppose he were to die? Do the dead suffer thirst?

It is over. Slowly, slowly, with the peace of weakness, they pour out of the synagogue into the

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central courtyard. Every one is tired, too tired for joy, but almost joyous with release. The courtyard is black with people. The murmur of prayers has changed to the new voice of feeble greetings, queries, the breath of gossip. The cool September air, a little dusty, the blue end of afternoon, spends its benediction on the slow stir of homebound worshippers. Some one looks up at the autumnal skies.

“The new moon!”

A shred of lemon-colored shell lies over the huddling roofs. The first glimpse of the new moon.

“The new moon! We must bless the new moon!”

The moving crowd rustles attentively. The message goes from mouth to mouth. The dark heads are lifted up, the faces lifted up to the light of the sky. The sacred words, in a shifting murmur, like an uneasy wind in trees, rise from the tired multitude. Above the raised faces the pale rim of moon hangs like a petal waiting to be blown wide. A blessing on the month; on the moon, a blessing, and on the sky where it rides, a blessing, and on the earth below, a blessing; on the night that it brightens, a blessing, and on the day in

Jacob Marshak

which it hides, a blessing. Lifted heads, susurrus of prayer, thread of light from the sky-shell . . . And then the soothing return to the calm commonplace with the renewal of greetings, gossip, homely interchange. This memory will fill the boy with sorrowful exaltation when he is a grown man walking alone under a strange moon in a country where men do not bless the morning or the evening hour.

Coming out of his dream, Marshak caught the eye of the little sallow Jew who was beating his breast, and they smiled recognition satirically, in fraternal distrust of the Goyim around them. Marshak folded his big arms and sighed. He was thinking of a story he had heard when he was a boy. A story of Yom Kippur Eve, and of a man returning from synagogue and finding his own door shut against him because his anxious wife thought it was not her husband who demanded entrance, but the soul of her brother who had died within the year and could not find shelter. Marshak had not thought of that story in years, but now the imagined scene—he had heard the tale recited, with vivid mimicry, a hundred times—came back to him with fresh force. He pondered the

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scene: the terrified woman behind the door, the man outside in the darkness slowly realizing her fear, which streams out and over him, chilling him with a rising horror, until he is afraid of his own self. . . .

Yes, a man could be afraid of himself. A good picture, your own or another man's, put the fear of God into you and you were glad to your marrow-bones. A bad picture—it need not even be a failure, just something to which you had given less than your whole powers—filled you with fear of yourself. And there were other things, too, that stirred the sleeping terror. Marshak had known it more often in America than elsewhere: this being nearly dead because you were made to think you were dead.

I am not dead yet, he assured himself, but they will kill me if they can. Who? He felt them crowding about him: the picture dealers who put a premium on being a dead painter; the magazine editors who put a premium on just not being alive; the fat patrons who wanted flattering portraits of their fat wives, with the pearls prominent; the art critics who wanted canvases they could understand; the women who thought artists should make love

Jacob Marshak

prettily; the men who thought that artists made love smuttily; the people who thought painting an affair for children and fools. The cruel cheerful swarming cities of America. The hard unloving shrewd sentimental people of America. Marshak couldn't feel at home with them. He wondered if he could ever paint for them.

How could they like his pictures?

The portrait of an old man, all chill blues and somber sepia, the lines strongly distorted, like the life-line of the sitter. Looking at it, you heard the baying of winter at your heels; you plunged your cold hand into the pocket of Time and withdrew it, empty; you asked if there could be contact with a fellow-creature, except such contact as there was in the huddled proximity of the potters' field, before a body poured itself back into untended earth.

Pictures: a dance in the prayer-house; the gaunt black figures of men posturing stiffly in ritual movement, the covered heads thrown slightly back, faces lit with a sacred mirth, the hands uplifted with outstretched palms; exalted tension, all the firm crooked lines bound together as by a cramped and striving music.

Pictures: a mother and child, thin face above

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thin face, thin cherishing arms, meager cherished body, the mother-hunger bowed above the hungry child, the Mother of Sorrows lost in the homely griefs of the ghetto, silenced in the backwash of the world.

Marshak came back to his "Mary." The vague notion of it had been swimming behind his eyes for weeks. Now he felt that he had seized it, seen the thing as it must, finally, be. It had grown up in that room beyond, taken shape and body and significance. His hands ached for his brushes. America was worth something to him now. He was not yet dead. He wanted a drink.

Reaching out clumsily, he struck the arm of the man nearest him. It was Leonard Hogarth.

Marshak liked him. Partly because Hogarth's face reminded him, unreasonably enough, of a Jew he used to know in Budapest. Marshak smiled his liking. There was a strain of pity in it. He was honest, this Leonard Hogarth, and unhappy. Marshak couldn't tell how he knew this, but it was clear to him. He didn't read Hogarth's stuff; it was written in an idiom of sophistication that put him off. But he had heard Hogarth talk now and again. He had met his friends. He had seen, often

Jacob Marshak

enough, his shabby pleasant room. He had watched Hogarth in front of his own pictures. Poor Hogarth!

But why "poor"? He at least should be at home in this America. But he had let himself drift. Perhaps because he had no woman.

Hogarth was restless. He didn't like this party much, either. So many people, trying to forget themselves, ignoring each other, wearing a mask of gayety, dancing, drinking. Marshak set down his empty glass. He liked good wine. But to drink the way these people did: like children making themselves sick with jam because it was forbidden. . . . And the dancing: like mechanical dolls, jig jig jig jig. Why had Hogarth come?

Marshak remembered. The look in Hogarth's eyes when he saw across the room their hostess's beckoning hand. Marshak pitied him afresh. He couldn't understand why it should be Pauline, rather than another; but who could ever understand such things? She was paintable, if not for Marshak, but that was unimportant. She had something—charm was a weak word—that pulled a man, something beyond physical loveliness. She

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was honest—or was she? Maxwell Peacock's wife. Poor Hogarth!

If he wanted her, he would have to fight. Harder than he had strength for, Marshak thought. He would have to break, in her, some stubborn fiber that the comradeship of Peacock had toughened, through years of quarrelsome love. And even if he got her in the end, he would be getting something of Peacock along with her. You had always to take, with your beloved, a part of her last beloved into your life. Marshak knew that. He frowned, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. And then, Pauline had a child. Marshak remembered the child: a little boy. About David's age. Marshak envisaged Davidka, a snug ball of sweet-smelling flesh rolled in the blankets, asleep; Davidka, solemn as a juror, smudged with charcoal, messing busily around the studio; Davidka, riotously hurling himself on his father at tea-time, a little goat for butting, a little bear for hugging, a little jackdaw for stealing sugar out of the bowl and tea-cakes off his father's plate and pencils out of his father's pockets. Could he ever give up Davidka? Not for any woman. For the sake of a picture, maybe? Marshak prayed he

Jacob Marshak

might never have to choose between Davidka and his pictures.

This was what his friend Hogarth would have to fight. Pauline's motherhood and Pauline's husband and the social success that this queer party somehow represented. Her husband wanted this and so she wanted it for him. How could she have anything left for Hogarth? Marshak, aware of the fever that the night had lit in his friend, wondered when he would dare the unequal struggle. He felt a warmth widening his eyelids that he recognized surprisedly as tears. He wanted to put a hand on Hogarth's arm, not for warning but for courage, for comfort even more. But Hogarth was no longer standing beside him—Marshak saw him disappearing through the doorway on the trail of a half-glimpsed woman who might be Pauline.

XI

Leonard

IT wasn't Pauline. But having caught up with the girl, Leonard had to pretend an interest. He was certain that he would find Pauline in a moment. She would descend from that strange room upstairs, where she had gone with Evelyn, and she would be touched by the painful miracle which she had there been attending. She would, he believed, as sick men believe in their physicians, as praying men believe in their priests, come to him so altered that he would scarcely need words to tell her what she must do. She would belong to him by virtue of his great need of her. His thought went no further. He was wrapped in blind necessity. So wrapped that he could even rest in the interval of trivial commerce that this strange girl promised. He was like a runner, poised for the race, careless of the sobbing minute that would meet him at the end, waiting, with easy breath and quiet heart, till the starter should have

Leonard

stopped counting and fired the shot that would send him forward.

The girl, no stranger after all, was Max's little sister, Audrey Peacock. Audrey was tall, like her brother, and very slim, and blonde, like him, with a small smooth head, the flaxen hair cut like a boy's, finely set on her narrow shoulders—a graceful, alert young figure, a lifted alert young face. Audrey, not yet entered upon the troubling twenties, was feverish with happy excitement. She was the only one of the Peacocks at the party. She had never been at a party quite like this before. Leonard was buoyed up by her eagerness, soothed by her ignorance. She did not even realize what was going forward in her sister-in-law's bedroom. She could not guess what had happened to Leonard Hogarth.

"Shall we dance?" Leonard asked her, indifferently.

Audrey put a hand on his sleeve:

"Oh, let's sit in the library a minute. I haven't been in there yet! Isn't it a darling house?"

Leonard took her into the library. It was an agreeable room, lined with low book-shelves, hidden now by people standing about, talking. On the

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walls were copies of a few "modern" pictures—nothing less recent than a Matisse. The mantelpiece above the fireplace held more books: novels by Huxley, Hamsun and Mrs. Woolf, Tristram Shandy, Russell on Relativity, a collection of Beerbohm's drawings, and a volume of poems by D. H. Lawrence. There was also a fine sang-de-bœuf vase filled with dried Chinese lanterns, and a small African wood-carving. Audrey was enchanted. These ornaments, these titles, these prints on the grass-cloth wall, the low leather easy-chairs, the sunny-colored hangings, these people: musicians, painters, actresses, intimately seen, conversing, drinking punch, eating sandwiches like anyone else, under the thin drifting pall of cigarette smoke, made her admire her brother Maxwell intensely, and wish herself a home like his, a husband who could provide her with just such a setting, surround her with just such a gay and distinguished company. Her tingling pleasure in everything was so strong that she infected Leonard with it ever so slightly. He might distrust Maxwell Peacock heartily, and want to smash his new home like a house of cards, but he could have

Leonard

only amused sympathy for Maxwell's little sister, Audrey.

She perched on a window-seat, swinging her neat young legs, cocking her small yellow head with pert appreciation. She had seen Leonard three or four times previously and did not, he guessed, take him as seriously as she did the other "important" people whom she had had pointed out to her. She could allow herself to confess to Leonard something of her marveling joy. The couple of drinks she had swallowed had loosened her tongue. He guessed that she thought all the women were wantons, and all the men roués, with the possible exception of Leonard and her own relatives, but this only lent zest to her apprehension of the scene. Perhaps she knew, or suspicioned, that Leonard had his moments of wanting to seduce—so, he guessed, she would phrase it—a lady, of wanting to seduce her sister-in-law. Everybody, especially the very young, knew everything, Leonard supposed, about everybody else. But little Audrey would rather savor that notion. She would never for a moment imagine that any woman could think more of Leonard than of her brother. For a gray second Leonard

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wondered if any woman could . . . if Pauline . . . ? Then he devoted himself to listening to Audrey.

"It's been the queerest day," she was bubbling, "absolutely! This afternoon I was out shopping—I didn't want to come to-night without bringing something for Jimmy. . . ."

Leonard lost a phrase or two: how had he forgotten Jimmy? But Jimmy had aunts, a grandmother. . . . At worst, he would take Jimmy, too. Anything. . . .

"So there I was, caught in the jam and couldn't move, with the sandwich-man and his Salvation Army friend right behind me. He was saying, sort of apologetically, 'Well, I don't want to call 'em hoboos, you know, but that's what they are.' And then there was something I couldn't hear, and then he said: 'They ast me, "How d'you eat? How d'you live?" I says: "God takes care of that." And he says: "I didn't ast you about God; I ast you, How do you eat?"' The Salvation Army man didn't say anything. I turned round to get a look at them; they were both youngish, especially the sandwich-man; he was thin and had great big eyes and big hands, too. I looked away and I must have

Leonard

missed something, and then he said: 'It ain't because they know I got a little money stored away. Anyway, that don't make any difference. Money ain't everything.' Then the traffic whistle blew and I had to cross. But what do you think of that, Mr. Hogarth,—a sandwich-man saying, 'Money ain't everything'!"

Leonard looked at Audrey, flushed and earnest and gay, and refrained from telling her what he thought of that. If he told anyone, it would be Pauline. He was glad Audrey had told him the story. God take care of the sandwich-man!

"People are so unexpected!" she exclaimed joyfully. "A minute ago I was dancing with John Van Anda—you know, the author of 'Pilgrim's Pride,' and I was trying to think of something smart to say to him and what d'you suppose he said? He said, 'My favorite reading-matter is *The Daily Pornographic*, with *Variety* running a close second. What's yours?' I just gasped! And then I recovered and confessed that I liked it, too—novels give you scandal so slowly you hardly know you're getting it. . . ."

"Like castor-oil in orange juice," suggested Leonard, grinning. The funny child.

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Audrey said, "Ugh!" and wrinkled her puckish nose. Then she asked solemnly:

"But do you think perhaps he was stringing me, and just wanted to catch me out?"

"No," said Leonard, "I don't think he was stringing you. Even the author of 'Pilgrim's Pride' may like his scandal straight." And if Pauline? . . . That would be scandal, too; *Daily Mirror* stuff: "BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WIFE DESERTS CHILD FOR . . ." Leonard tried to guess how the scareheads would describe him in a word, and failed. He set it down for a weakness in himself. Thought of Dante, of Chaucer, putting the vernacular to the uses of literature, dealing in gossip that lasted not for an age, but for all time. He observed the pretty chatterer beside him. Come, sweet Audrey, let us be married or we must live in bawdry. She had been rattling on gaily:

"He was quite lit, you see, and just to divert him I said suddenly: 'To-day's my birthday,' and then he said, 'How many?' and I said, 'Nineteen,' and he said, stuttering—it seems so funny, somehow, for a pianist to stutter—"Then I must give you nineteen kisses!" And at first I was too sur-

Leonard

prised to stop him, and then it was too late, and I'd always admired him so when I heard him play, I never thought . . ." She blushed charmingly, Leonard could feel the young heat in her. She must have been looking for someone to confess to ever since it happened. She couldn't have liked it, or she would have held her peace.

"And are you really just nineteen?" he asked.

"Yes," she murmured.

"Allow me to congratulate you upon your great youth," said Leonard gravely. It was eleven years since he had been nineteen. He hadn't appreciated it at the time. *Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice . . .* He asked himself if after another eleven years he would look back upon this moment as regrettably precious. Pauline was twenty-eight: she would be thirty-nine then. Jimmy would be thirteen—an unlucky age.

"Even Maxwell," observed Maxwell's little sister, "makes love when he's lit."

I should rather say that Maxwell makes love even when he's lit, thought Leonard; but the child wouldn't appreciate the remark. He was silent a moment, then, like an unsure skater testing the ice, he asked:

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"What d'you think of Maxwell, anyway, Audrey?"

The girl cocked her head on the other side, considering.

"He's not a bad egg, really," she said. "I like him a lot. Of course, he rather plays the high-and-mighty with me; thinks he has to protect me from my best friends, and all that sort of thing. But I forgive him. And he's frightfully clever—cleverer than you," she noted, with a bird's glance at Leonard. "I think Pauline spoils him—so did Mother. But, then, if I were married to him, maybe I would, too. You don't care much for him, do you?" she asked.

The little devil, the cool little devil! Had he known as much, at nineteen? He hadn't had a brother to know, but even so. . . .

"Why does Pauline spoil him?" Leonard inquired. The truth of Audrey's assertion frightened him.

After a pause, "She's afraid of him, I guess," said Audrey.

Leonard couldn't go on. She knew too much. She probably knew all about him, too. Pauline afraid of Maxwell—that could only mean one

Leonard

thing, one fear: the fear of losing him. The security he had felt a few minutes since, when, filled with his need for Pauline, he had encountered Audrey, was slipping away like blood draining from a sick face. It was as if he felt himself go pale. Suddenly he suspected that Audrey, understanding everything, was enjoying this, was adding his torture, which, after all, he'd invited, to her treasure of thrilling experiences. The notion made him angry. He asked brutally:

"Is there anyone you're afraid of, Audrey?" He had meant to say "anything," the "anyone" had come in spite of him.

She said nothing, bent her head and swung her narrow foot. It was a stupid minute. He wished he'd never run after her. He wouldn't have, if she hadn't in the half-light looked absurdly like Pauline. Pauline. Pauline. The name went milling through his head.

Because he had seen her, again, at the far end of the room, vivid, immediate, and dear. Seeing her, everything dropped away from him: the buzzing crowd between them; the pert shy girl beside him; Maxwell, off somewhere, with a crony or another pretty girl, drinking or making love; Jimmy,

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upstairs, snug and asleep. . . . His own self was unreal to him. He was simply a nervous urgency, intent upon her look, waiting to go to her, to become whole again, embodied, truly alive. Their eyes met. Hers were a summons.

He was moving to go to her when the room was rent, stricken, by a sound from nowhere—a woman's scream.

XII

Mort Gambel

MORTIMER GAMBEL was under no illusions as to why he had been invited to young Peacock's house-warming. Mort Gambel flattered himself he was a pretty hard-headed fellow. A man can't reach the age of fifty-three (gray hair thinning, jokes with his tailor over suits for stylish stouts, trouble at the dentist's) carting a load of illusions. He wouldn't be where he was to-day if he hadn't looked facts pretty sharply in the face.

People knew Mort Gambel. The head-waiter at Sherry's—what was the guy's name, Louis? Oscar?—he knew Mr. Gambel. He was always ready with the sheltered table at the window facing the room and not too near the music—Mr. Gambel's table. Mr. Gambel had given him some pretty good tips on U. S. Tobacco, and Car and Foundry. The fellows who sat on the center aisle seats at dress rehearsals—they knew Mort Gambel.

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Asked him if he thought the show could be a whizz, in spite of the flop second act. He took a flier in shows, once in a while. Not so slow, Mort Gambel. The men on the Street knew him. Liked to have him in on a good thing. Depended on him not to make a fool of himself, or of them. A straight enough chap, Gambel. Of course, the Bar knew him. Mitchell, Gambel, O'Callahan and Jones: the firm *was* Gambel. Mitchell had retired. O'Callahan was found dead of heart-failure at his desk, when was it?—in '18: newspaper reported his only son killed at the Front. Funny thing, too, the boy wasn't killed at all, misprint or something, found it out after the father's funeral. And Jones, well, Jones . . . Gambel could have had a judgeship if he'd wanted it. But he hadn't. Politics was a fool game. He liked risks that took more brains than cash. Besides, it would make him feel old. Women knew Mortimer Gambel. He wasn't an easy mark, but he was decent. And he didn't ask much. He always gave them enough to dress on; he couldn't stand a dowd. He didn't care about their patter, so long as they looked well. And he liked them to listen to him in the furnishing of the apartment, quiet taste, he had, there. And he never

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let them down. Dear Morty. But he was off women for a while. Getting old, Mortimer?

He knew why he had been asked to the housewarming of the young Peacocks. He'd taken a fancy to the young fellow, somehow. Fine-looking chap, and a head keen as a razor. Sweet little wife, too. Gambel had met him lunching with her and Jones one day. She was doing some work for Jones—had passed her Bar exams last year. Fancy! But it wasn't the wife, this time, that had taken Gambel's eye. A man getting on, past fifty, no boys of his own to nurse into the profession—well, he likes to have a youngster to say a good word for, to push ahead. Peacock was in another field entirely, of course. Doing publicity work. But Gambel had friends in that galley, too. He wasn't past dreaming of doing something for Peacock. Sharp as a razor, that boy. Peacock had guessed it. He was pretty well fixed now. But he was ambitious. Ambitious as hell. Expensive wants, he had. Cultivated taste. Gambel had helped him to cultivate it. Wouldn't do, though, for him to be too greedy at first. Gambel had tried to tell him—the iron warning in the velvet voice.

Gambel had tried to tell him other things: his

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game should be to get out of his shell a little more. Not that Peacock was a close sort. Not a bit of it. But he was young, he had young friends, he kept on playing around with them. As though he hadn't his way to make in the world. And he was so damn smart—he got bored talking to the duds he ought to talk to. Gambel didn't blame him. But it's the duds that make the world go round. If there weren't so many of them, there wouldn't need to be any lawyers, there couldn't be any advertising men. Gambel had taken him up to his own apartment, had him there to dinner one night with two other couples; the four others, clients, duds, absolutely. Little Mrs. Peacock, pretty little thing, she'd been rather out of it. Only person she could find to talk to had been Gambel! He grinned when he thought of it. Felt like purring, a bit. Talked law, the little thing had—fancy! Labor law. Well. That wouldn't get her husband very far. Gambel had asked them in order to show the young fellow what he ought to do. He'd taken the hint. That, and a few stronger hints, had got him into renting this very house; charmingly furnished, too, trust the girl to take care of that—Pauline, her name was. And this house-warming

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was just a kind of starter for other parties, of the same sort. He'd invited Gambel just to show him that he'd taken the hint. H'mm.

But it wasn't, after all, the sort of affair Gambel had intended, altogether. Was it the sort of thing Peacock had intended, himself? Gambel looked about him. Superficially, it had seemed to be the usual crush, lots of women all dolled up, most of 'em in red, red was fashionable this season; a sprinkling of men in full dress, some tuxedos; smokes, drinks, dancing, necking—that was what they called it nowadays, wasn't it? Used to be called spooning, once—God, he was getting old. Trouble was, that wasn't the whole scene. Not by a long shot. Here in the library there was a regular menagerie that seemed to be assembled without any distinction as to race, color, or previous condition of servitude, all ages, all sexes. There were any number of fellows in sack suits, there was even one in snuff-colored tweeds and a girl in a shirt-waist! Actually. Gambel had forgotten that girls had ever worn shirtwaists. His stenographer didn't. And, early in the evening, he'd noticed a woman who was pregnant, far gone, too. Lucky thing

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Peacock hadn't asked the Joneses. Mrs. Jones would never have done clucking about it.

Didn't Peacock know he oughtn't to mix his drinks this way? He'd get in Dutch with the very people he was giving his party *for*. The men might be too lit to appreciate what a crowd it was, but the women would notice, and be put out. It was a good card having a few highbrows, artists and all that—they'd like seeing Simone Remey in the flesh, all gold like a golden candlestick, and they'd crane their necks for a glimpse of Tommy Lucas—if Peacock had only stopped the victrola and let him play before he got too tight. . . . But that big blond man in the blue shirt, with the yellow hair that needed the attention of a barber—Gambel didn't know his name, but he'd been hanging about with the fellow in the snuff-colored tweeds. He didn't belong here to-night. Foreigner, of course. Jew, maybe. Must warn Peacock off that, you've got to pick your Jews. Oh, it was a queer lot.

It must be that little Pauline. Gambel guessed that when they'd first talked about having a housewarming, she'd told her husband whom she wanted to ask. And she must have been awfully

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sore when he turned over *his* list. Gambel thought he could hear her, in that throaty voice of hers, objecting calmly: "But you don't like these people, Maxwell." And he could hear Peacock explaining, with some annoyance, because he *didn't* like them—"I'm inviting 'em because I want 'em to like me, my dear." And she would have tried to insist that you can keep your private life free of business. The place for a client was in the office. New version of the sanctity of the home—though the little thing would probably laugh at the notion of the sanctity of the home. She must have given Peacock a tough time of it. And in the end, they'd compromised. Dangerous thing, compromise. You always lost as much as you gained. And yet that was three-quarters of life—and the law. Gambel frowned.

But Pauline must have invited some of the good eggs, too. She wasn't a clever little thing for nothing. She, as well as her husband, would know how to surround herself with pleasant people. Besides, hadn't she married Peacock? That showed taste, foresight. . . . She must have known what she was doing when she picked him. Why wasn't she more of a help to him now?

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Gambel asked himself why he should keep thinking of that fellow in brown tweeds. He'd seen him with Pauline a couple of times during the evening, that was all. No special reason why the girl shouldn't have asked him, Gambel supposed, though he ought to have known enough to dress for an affair like this. Funny eyes, he had. Doggy eyes. In love with Peacock's wife? There must be young men in love with Peacock's wife. She asked for it, when she looked as sweet as she did to-night. Gambel thought: he'd like me to be in love with his wife, I bet. Not badly. Just a mild American flirtation, nobody's fingers burnt—the sort of thing that would make me want to help *him*, God damn it. Well, Gambel didn't blame Peacock. He'd be the same way, with a pretty wife, and a fortune in the making, and an old fool like himself ready to lend a hand.

He was an old fool. Old. He passed a veined hand over his smooth gray head. He knew the hand was heavily veined, the hair was almost white now.

But it was going to be awkward for Peacock if his wife did take up with somebody else. This wasn't the time. Besides, customers didn't like it.

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If it should come to a divorce . . . now why should he think of a divorce in connection with Pauline? Women didn't jump into court just because they wanted a change, nowadays. But Peacock was a jealous sort. And that wife of his wouldn't go halfway. Or would she? And if they settled it out of court, it would get around just the same. A crazy world it was—a couple that wanted a divorce would keep off a lawyer who didn't live with his wife; now why? Gambel allowed himself an imperceptible shrug. It wouldn't hurt Peacock that way, of course. And they had a child, too. The little Pauline had let herself in for that.

Across the room he saw the fellow in tweeds standing with folded arms next to a blonde girl in blue. Younger than Pauline. Oh, a snip of a thing. Cute. Why, that was the one he'd caught Tommy Lucas kissing half an hour ago. She hadn't liked it. Lucas had been pretty well primed. A vivacious little girl, she was. Sweet to kiss. Fresh, untouched. You always told yourself they were untouched—oh, well. But this one really was a mere child; young enough to be Gambel's daughter. It would be rather jolly, having a daughter, instead of . . .

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Gambel tried to imagine himself being petted and teased by a young girl who would call him "Dad." And failed. Who wanted to be anybody's father, anyway? That didn't get you anywhere.

His mind snapped back to a bright long narrow room in which an enormous black walnut sideboard crowded a long bright heavily-heaped table, about which noisy heads were bobbing, busy with talk and food. Christmas, or somebody's birthday. The people had all been relations, but to little Morty Gambel, the youngest one there, they had been mostly strangers. He had sat between his Aunt Agnes and his Grandfather Gambel. He remembered his Aunt Agnes saying, "No, Morty, you don't want fish—you have roast chicken," and Grandfather Gambel, a thick-set old man with red mottled cheeks bulging above his tickly stiff white whiskers, had said crossly: "He shall have fish and chicken, too—you take the bones out for him, Aggie. Fish'll give him brains. Here, Morty, you taste this!" and had offered him a mouthful from his own plate with his own big fork. Morty hadn't liked it because Grandfather Gambel chewed noisily and Mama said you mustn't eat off other people's forks, but

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still he had been proud to be fed from the plate of Grandfather Gambel, who always got the choicest bits. And then the picture dissolved into the vision of another room, it must have been a kitchen, with a huge oven and a bare wooden floor and a loud clock, and he was being rolled around in a clothes-basket by his cousin Sam, and Sam was shouting and he was laughing and bouncing—he was like a little fat bag filled full and running over with laughter—and suddenly someone tall and stout and hard appeared in the doorway and said, “How can you laugh like that when your Grandfather is dead?” And Morty had been frightened and wanted to stop but another small laugh had rolled out of him; he couldn’t help it. And he had been ashamed of himself and angry at the hard person and curious about Grandfather Gambel all at once before his laugh stopped.

All that was forty—nearly fifty—years ago, now. Grandfather Gambel had died in ’79, hadn’t he? And Aunt Agnes was dead. And Cousin Sam. And Mama. And Papa. Cousin Sam would have been the only one to remember. And that hard person must have been a servant—in her grave, too, by this time. Cousin Sam, and Morty in the

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clothes-basket. . . . Grandfather Gambel and his forkful of fish for Morty. . . . It was only the other day all that had happened, wasn't it? And it was only the other day that Morty Gambel had celebrated his fiftieth birthday: food, wine, flowers, songs; someone had made up a song with the punning refrain, "De Mort' nil nisi bonum!" They had meant it for a joke; it had turned him cold. Well, he would be cold pretty soon. Fifty-three. Grandfather Gambel must have been near eighty when he keeled over. But Morty Gambel wasn't going to last like that. Well, when he slipped out they wouldn't need to hush any little giggling boy because he was dead.

But it was over too damn quick, this show. Too goddamn quick. And not a bad show, either, when you took it in as Mort Gambel had taken it. You didn't want 'em to ring down the curtain like that. Why, you'd just got settled in your chair to see it right when the orchestra began playing "Home, Sweet Home." Funny, so many things had happened to him—God, what a lot of things had happened to him!—and inside he was still little Morty Gambel, ashamed and angry and frightened

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and inquisitive, scrambling out of the clothes-basket with a left-over laugh.

Gambel thought he'd better have a drink. This was what struck a man when he came to a party of youngsters. Made him feel superannuated. If only he didn't have that crazy feeling about Peacock's wife and the man in tweeds! That was what set him off. All rot, of course. Maybe there was something wrong with his liver. Ought to get Doc Bacon to give him the once-over . . . no time to be sick, now. Why, fifty-three's the prime of life, he said, swallowing his bracer hastily. Shake a leg, old man. Don't be a quitter now.

The liquor ran into his finger-tips tinglingly, played around his innards, shot warmth and comfort through and through Mortimer Gambel. That's what comes of moping in a corner, he told himself. Go on, cut in on that chap in tweeds, take his pretty girl away from him; he doesn't want her anyway, and she'd be tickled to death to talk to an old sophisticate—the little kitten, more likely a baby she-snake; all right, Mort, old man, go and be a snake-charmer!

Gambel squared his shoulders, shot his cuffs,

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passed a hand, a well-manicured hand, over his head, smoothing his sleek hair. He'd let the child try to vamp him; it would amuse them both. And maybe, you never can tell, he'd find out something from her about how things stood between this chap and Pauline Peacock.

He was halfway across the room when he saw the man in tweeds turn abruptly from the girl and move toward the door. By God, that was Pauline Peacock he was going to—leaving the girl in the lurch. Gambel cheered her silently for looking so unembarrassed, when the fellow seemed to have left her cold. She sure was getting a raw deal to-night—first Lucas slobbering over her and then this chap giving her the gate like that. And she was so damn pretty, too. Well, Morty Gambel would look out for her now.

"I hope you'll excuse a lonely old bachelor for making his own introduc—"

A scream sawed harshly through his word, cutting it in half. It cut the room in half. It cut Time in half. When the rent closed again the girl had her hand on his arm. She was pale, controlling a shudder.

"Oh!" she murmured, "it sounded like—"

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Gambel knew that the word her throat closed on was "murder."

He patted her hand gently. He drew her with him toward the doorway leading to the room where the victrola stood. As they brushed past Pauline he heard her say to the man in tweeds:

"Oh, Leonard, it's begun!"

And the man's answer:

"Nothing begins and nothing ends that is not paid with—"

But the cost of ends and beginnings was lost, for Mortimer Gambel, in the welcoming roar of the dance-music.

XIII

Leonard

“ . . . that is not paid with moan,” murmured Leonard, omitting to conclude the quotation. Beastly, this habit of allusion. He recalled hearing Tommy Lucas say that there wasn’t a minute when his head was free of music; when he was fit, the music was Bach or Brahms, Ravel or Stravinsky; and he’d noticed one day when he was savage with hunger that the angrier he got, the jazzier and more vulgar the tunes became: he got down to “Silver Threads Among the Gold.” Leonard wondered if Marshak was affected the same way visually; whether the world—no, not the world—but his own moods, presented themselves to him in a series of pictures: arranged masses, blobs of color floating changefully in and out of his consciousness. What would a painter see when he was gay—Hals, Van Gogh? And when he was melancholy—Ribera, Picasso? Leonard considered all this and admitted to him-

Leonard

self that Pauline hadn't recognized his quotation and wondered how he could think about these matters at this moment, in the few seconds between the scream and the sound of Pauline's half-frightened, half-commanding voice, saying:

"I must find Maxwell."

Leonard was humbled, and violent.

"Never mind Maxwell," he said sternly. And then, "What do you want done?" with all the gentleness that was in him. Poor little Pauline.

She shrugged her soft shoulders. She laughed. Leonard adored her laugh. It came at such unexpected moments, as now, when she found her party, Max's party, and something bigger than the party, tumbling about her ears. She would always meet disaster with that rippling chuckle. No need to be afraid for Pauline.

"I don't know," she confessed, "what to do." Her white brow wrinkled. He wanted to kiss it. He said:

"Don't do anything."

Pauline laughed again, and frowned.

"They'll want to go home," she decided. "If they hear her again, and if her door opens again I don't see how they can help it. And all their

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things—the women's things, are in Max's room; I dumped them there when Evelyn got into my bed."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see? Max's room is right next to mine—just the bathroom between. They'll surely hear her, if they go upstairs."

"Well?" asked Leonard. His voice sounded woodenly stupid in his own ears. Did it sound so to Pauline, too? But he couldn't help it. The milk was spilt, the eggs were broken—they *had* heard Evelyn already; what did it matter if they heard her again, and again, and again? Only, he thought quickly, he didn't want to hear it again: it tore through you so that your bowels writhed. It seemed to have nothing to do with Evelyn; his pity was all for Pauline, as though the cry were her cry, the pangs her pangs. . . . Something was going to be born to-night of these wrenched hours, and Pauline seemed not to know. . . .

"You want the house emptied," he suggested.

"Is it necessary?" asked Pauline.

Leonard felt as though he were breathing cotton-wool. But he didn't blame her. How could she know what she wanted? He wondered what

Leonard

sort of education would train a woman to meet crises. Train a man, either, for that matter. One ought to take them in small doses, like some powerful drug, and then increase the dose, until one could bear—anything.

He asked himself how, while he was listening to young Audrey Peacock, he had been able to forget, to ignore, Evelyn Mayne, lying upstairs in Pauline's bed, with her agony and her helplessness. He had been so wrapped in the thought of Pauline, so dedicated to her, that nothing else could get over to him; he had been, he told himself, like a switchboard with all the plugs out, except the one that allowed him to catch, faintly and from far off, the whisper of the music that spelled Pauline to him. And here he was, standing beside her, almost touching her, so close that he could see the tiny grains of powder at the base of her warm ivory throat, the colorless down that outlined the ridges between nose and lip, the way the black lashes were rooted in the lids of her eyes—so close to her that his need for her was crossed by a pin-scratch of dislike. For a second she was mere breathing flesh, an alien creature from which he must escape, to endure at all. And following

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that morbidness, the hot query went pounding through him: how, if she were truly close to him, so close that he could no longer see her . . . And then, as if to cool him, once more from above, startling, rending, immitigable—a scream.

Leonard moved blindly toward the door, stood with his back against it, holding it closed, as though to shut out that cry, as though to barricade the room from knowledge of it, to protect Pauline, to show his own strength, to, to, to— Oh, God.

Pauline followed him. She stood before him, small, dark, strong, perfect. She said, quietly:

“You must let me out, Leonard, or I’ll be besieged—” She barely tossed her dark head toward the roomful of guests behind her. “And I must find Maxwell.”

But why?

“Let me come with you.” He stood aside, but he did not open the door to let her go.

It seemed to him that there were no voices in the room but their voices, no life in the room but their life, their half-acknowledged conflict. And yet he was aware that the room was full of people, talking. Disturbed people whom it was his business to soothe, if he were to please Pauline. Scared,

Leonard

curious, excited people, trying not to credit their own ears, not to surrender to their own imaginations. Polite people, amazed and shuddering, like children at the circus who suddenly found themselves in the jungle of nightmare. More like pedestrians coming upon an accident in the street: they would feel themselves helpless to help, and yet they would be drawn toward the dreadful scene; they would want to wait for the ambulance, but they would not want to be involved; they would be ashamed of their curiosity, and wounded by the bloody reality, and a little proud of being present at the fatal moment, and shaken, and afraid. All this. And he was to play the part of the policeman: holding the crowd back, giving the victim air, reassuring the women, commanding the men, and taking down the details in his little notebook—the policeman, as abashed and beaten, under the surface calm of his authority, as anyone else—the policeman, wishing it hadn't happened on his beat, and dimly pleased, and loudly officious.

She put a hand on his sleeve. The touch burned through the thick tweed of his suit, making his arm tingle.

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"I'm going to give you a job," said Pauline, firmly.

"Yes?" That meant that she was sending him away. When would he have her, talk to her, claim her? She would be off, getting hold of Maxwell in a moment, and then . . . ?

"It's a horrid job," said Pauline sweetly.

"All right."

She had taken her hand from his arm. The constriction in his throat lessened.

"I want you to go up to Max's room and get the women's clothes and take them downstairs. Put them—put them—oh, but the men's things are in the big hall closet. . . . And the dining-room's too smoky. Put them in that little alcove under the stairs where Jimmy keeps his toys. It'll have to do. There are a couple of chairs there. And I'll send down a mirror. Martha will help you."

You screwed yourself up for some tremendous act and—you were given the job of hat-check boy. Well. But Pauline . . . My mind, said Leonard harshly to himself, is remarkably like a squirrel-cage. But Pauline . . .

He said: "Right-o!"

But he didn't want to open the library door—

Leonard

perhaps on another scream—certainly on Pauline's exit, Pauline's vanishment. He opened the door.

In the hall she blew him a kiss as she turned away. A meaningless kiss. But maybe, when they were all gone—he was to bring down their wraps; they would go—he would be left alone with Pauline. And Maxwell. And Evelyn. He would be left alone with Pauline.

Upstairs, he wondered a second which was Max's door. Suppose he were to burst in upon Evelyn! It was quiet in there—that must be the one. He entered a room completely dark except for the stream of lamplight from down the street. Where was the switch? Something in the far corner moved with a rustling noise. The outline of a crib loomed up bulky in the half-dark. He was in Jimmy's room. He must get out before the kid woke up. Tiptoe. Suppose he woke up anyway—when Evelyn let out another scream. . . . But children sleep like dormice.

Closing the door silently on Jimmy's slumbers, Leonard asked himself why the sight of the crib should have depressed him so. He felt suddenly beaten. It was as if the crib were a solid symbol of the established, ordered life of Jimmy's mother.

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Leonard never thought of Pauline as Jimmy's mother. As Maxwell Peacock's wife, yes. But you could snatch her out of that. Could you snatch her away from the tall crib, stuffed with blankets, under which, with rustling noises, moved a little boy?

Leonard snapped on the light in Max's room. It was a wide, high-ceiled room that looked the more spacious because it held so few pieces of furniture. A heavy old chest in one corner. A couple of rush-bottom chairs. A wooden bed under a mountain of dark coats and furs and gleaming scarves. A small table with some studs on it, a dirty ash-tray, a copy of *The New Yorker*, and a richly monogrammed gray correspondence card written all over in a woman's dashing script. There were three pictures on the cork-colored walls: a fine copy of Manet's "Olympia," a small blunt landscape by Vlaminck, and, off in the corner away from everything else, an energetic Japanese print, bright, quick, and, on closer observation, naughty. The room, the contents of the bed-table, the three pictures, pushed themselves at Leonard like live things.

He had not tried to see it all—not consciously

Leonard

tried. He wanted to ignore Max's room, as he wanted to ignore Max. But it had not let him alone. It had plucked at his senses, fairly danced into his eyes, so that he had no refuge, no retreat. It was like being confronted by Max, watching him caress his neat blond moustache, hearing him breathe, waiting for him to speak—or to strike out.

Leonard had no business in Max's room except to collect the wraps that lay lumpily upon the bed and carry them down to the alcove where the toys were kept. A few trips back and forth, being careful not to trail things, going quietly so as not to wake Jimmy, or bother Evelyn, or make passing guests too sharply aware that something other than their party was taking place in this house and they had best leave it. But before he touched the things on the bed Leonard was assailed by the fact that here was this room of Max's, that he was in this room—there was the door to the bathroom that connected this with Pauline's room.

Leonard snatched three heavy coats and a pair of long white kid gloves, thrust a fur scarf on top, and tucking his chin over them to hold all together, made for the door. All the way down the hall and down the stairs to the landing Leonard

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kept seeing the little table with the studs and the correspondence card, and the giddy Japanese print and the "Olympia"—serenely sensual and insolent.

He reached the alcove where the toys stood: a small express-wagon and a headless duck on wheels and a woolly dog with mocking button eyes. Beside a black kitchen-chair was a clothes-rack with some empty hangers. Leonard dropped the coats and then picked them up one after the other, to dispose them upon the hangers, with the meticulousness, he observed, of a tailor's assistant. He placed the gloves over the chair-back and draped the fur scarf over the shoulder of a coat. The smell of fur and sachet was in his nostrils, a woman-smell. Everything seemed to be working for his despair. The expensive cloaks and scarves, the remembered objects in Max's room, were one in their denial of his right to intrude himself here, to come to Pauline talking about sacred intangibles, to ask Pauline to share a life in which furniture of this sort had the last, most neglected place. He went up, weary with no physical weariness, for another load.

Once more in Max's room, conscious of the

Leonard

monogrammed note lying open on the table, of the calm eyes of the "Olympia" fastened unseeingly upon him, he became acutely aware of things hidden in the drawers of the fine old chest, things concealed behind the doors of the closet, things ranged upon the shelves of the adjoining bathroom, things that Max used, things that Max dropped, things that Max wrapped about his body or drank from or sat upon or threw into the wastebasket or, even, handed to Pauline: Max's shoes in serried state, and Max's dressing-gown limply vivid on a hook, and Max's shaving-cup and Max's bottle of bay rum and Max's laundry and Max's towels. He was sucked under by this flood of daily and nightly paraphernalia. He was choked with the intimacies of Max's bodily existence.

He moved like an automaton, filling his arms with wraps, dragging them downstairs, and running up, and going down again, the smell of fur and sachet sticky in his nostrils, the vision of Max's room, what he had seen there, what he had imagined, gummed to his eyelids. And courage and hope were gone out of him like a light blown out by the wind.

In Such a Night

But at the core of his emptiness was something firm. Unto us a Child is born—unto us a Son is given. If the woman lying in Pauline's bed were to cry out once more—if he could hold Pauline against his thickly beating heart through that crying . . .

XIV

Pauline

SHE didn't really hear what he said. But she was certain that he was quoting something. Leonard was always quoting. Just now it seemed to Pauline irrelevant; but she supposed he couldn't help it. It was like Max's habit of exalting uninspired moments by taking a drink. Like Jimmy's habit—when she was trying very hard to think—of bursting into tuneless song.

The scream that Evelyn had let out was still shuddering through Pauline's nerves. It had brought her back sharply to the hours when little Jimmy was making his way into the world. Hours Pauline preferred to forget—hours she must forget if she was ever to have another baby, and Jimmy ought to have a little brother soon. It was his right. Whatever Max said. Whatever she herself felt about the process. She shivered internally. Oh, damn.

But why was she standing here with Leonard?

In Such a Night

He was a dear, of course, and she liked him immensely, but the person she had to see now, at once, was Maxwell.

"I must find Maxwell," she said, as much to herself as to Leonard Hogarth. She didn't really see Leonard until he said, sternly:

"Never mind Maxwell." And then he added in that gentle voice that sometimes frightened her a little because she knew it was a sign of danger: "What do you want done?"

But it didn't frighten her now. She was too deeply troubled to be worried by Leonard's affection. And she was suddenly struck by the absurdity of such a question at such a time. What did she want done, indeed? Her throat trembled with a small gurgle of laughter. She couldn't help it.

"I don't know," she said then, "what to do." She felt her forehead wrinkle, and made it smooth again: if you did that often enough, the wrinkle stayed. Max . . .

"Don't do anything," said Leonard helpfully.

That made her laugh again, and frown again. It was so funny to think of trying to do nothing, and it was funnier, if anything, to think of trying to stop—what? Not Evelyn, and not the party.

Pauline

If only Evelyn had had sense enough to stay home! If Will Mayne had had sense . . . Max hadn't wanted to invite them. He had said, "Mayne will drag his wife along—he's a model husband since a baby's on the way. And Evelyn will crab the party—sitting in a corner and looking like the epitome of a maternity clinic." But Pauline had insisted: they owed it to the Maynes to ask them, and if Evelyn wanted to come, why be Victorian about her? There'd be so many others, anyway. That was just it, Max had argued sullenly: there would be too many others to have a woman in Evelyn's condition sitting obtrusively about; if there was anything Georgian, rather than Victorian or Edwardian, it was having a suitable party. Pauline had won, in the end. Now she wished she hadn't. It was so often like that. She won, and then wished she hadn't. That was one of Max's ways of putting it over on her. But how absurd: as though Max had wanted to complicate his party with Evelyn's baby!

The question was how the party would take it. It was Pauline's job to see that they took it quietly and didn't annoy Max too much. For, after all, it was her fault for insisting that the Maynes

In Such a Night

should come. Pauline thought most of them would want to leave. People hated to be present at a crisis. It made them feel incompetent and dull and small. And then there was Evelyn to be thought of. Not that Evelyn would care. She wouldn't know anything while *that* was going on.

"They'll want to go home," Pauline told herself aloud, while Léonard stood patiently by, "if they hear her again, and if her door opens again I don't see how they can help it." Pauline wondered if she had shrieked like that. The shrieks had seemed to be pulled out of her without her volition, a necessary accompaniment of the pain. Poor Evelyn.

And then she thought: but the women will have to go upstairs for their wraps.

"And all their things, the women's things," she explained to Leonard, who suddenly appeared very stupid, "are in Max's room. I dumped them there when Evelyn got into my bed." That had been another mistake. Max hated people in his room. And besides . . .

"Well?" asked Leonard.

"Well, don't you see? Max's room is right next to mine—just the bathroom between. They'll surely hear her, if they go upstairs."

Pauline

"Well?" said Leonard again.

He was really stupid, thought Pauline. With all his imagination, and he was supposed to have a lot, he didn't see what it would be like—all those women trooping upstairs into Max's room, clattering Max's room, and hearing—they couldn't help it—what was going on in her own room, where Evelyn lay, in her bed.

Some of them had had babies themselves. Oh, it would make them sick. When they expected to have a jolly foolish time all night and way into the morning. And they'd gossip to their husbands about it. And the men would be sicker. Max would simply loathe meeting any of them afterwards. He'd feel as though he had cheated them. And they would feel cheated. They'd expected a foolish jolly time—excitement, but not this kind.

"You want the house emptied," suggested Leonard.

Pauline wondered, did she? To be left alone with Evelyn in her agony, and Will Mayne crazy with worry; he hadn't got hold of Dr. Grimm yet, and it wasn't as though he himself were a proper physician—he was only a psychiatrist. To be left alone with Evelyn in her agony, and Max in his

In Such a Night

fury. And Martha—Martha would certainly give notice. And if Jimmy should hear . . . It would be hard on the poor little tike; it would scare him so. Oh!

“Is it necessary?” asked Pauline. She didn’t really mean it. Of course the house must be emptied. Of course people must be allowed to go home. And Evelyn must have quiet, for her helpless noise. And Max . . .

And then—like a pointed stone splitting her apart—a second scream.

Where was Maxwell? Where was Maxwell?

Leonard moved to the door and stood with his back against it, holding it closed. Locking the stable door after the horse was gone, thought Pauline. They’ve all heard it, you poor goose. They’re all in a state, and pretending they’re not, and being decent. . . . They don’t know what’s going to happen next. They’re waiting for me to give them the cue.

She trotted over to Leonard. They must give her time. He must let her out. She must find Maxwell.

“. . . let me out, Leonard, or I’ll be besieged.”

Pauline

He didn't stir, as though he were deaf.

"And I must find Maxwell."

"Let me come with you," muttered Leonard.

He seemed to her that second like a child, like Jimmy, somehow frightened and hurt, and ignorant of what had done it. She placed her hand compassionately on his arm.

"I'm going," she said, "to give you a job. It's a horrid job," she added maliciously. That would wake him up. He mustn't get like this, not now at any rate; not ever, really.

"All right," said Leonard. He was more natural already.

(She shouldn't have touched him. Oh, what a fool she was! But he was a fool, too, if he thought . . .)

"I want you to go up to Max's room and get the women's things and take them downstairs. Put them . . ." (Where?) "Put them—oh, but the men's things are in the big hall closet. . . . And the dining-room's too smoky. Put them in that little alcove under the stairs where Jimmy keeps his toys. It'll have to do."

Maybe the sight of Jimmy's old express-wagon

In Such a Night

would bring Leonard to his senses. Did he know that there had been whole minutes when she had been willing to chuck Jimmy—for what?

“There are a couple of chairs there,” added Pauline. “And I’ll send down a mirror. Martha will help you.”

It would be a good thing to keep Martha busy too.

“Right-o!” said Leonard, and opened the library door.

They passed into the hall together. Now she would find Maxwell. As she turned to go, she felt a wave of pity and gratitude for Leonard: he *was* a dear; you could count on Leonard. Lightly, she blew him a kiss. Then she made for the dining-room, and Maxwell.

She could count on Leonard. She couldn’t count on Maxwell. Sometimes she asked herself if she would be less fond of a Maxwell who was thoroughly dependable, a rock in the deep waters of experience. More often she was too preoccupied with the matter of adjusting herself to Max’s moods to ask any questions. To-night, this minute, she was badly troubled.

There had been so many quarrels. Final quar-

Pauline

rels. When it was all over, done, finished. Even after Jimmy came. Times when it had seemed impossible to go on, because Max appeared to care so much more for the pleasure he got from some casual comrade, or for the easy peace he bought with liquor, or for playing recklessly the part of the unrepentant prodigal, than he cared for the wife of his bosom. And then, afterwards, when the door had banged upon the bitterest recrimination, afterwards, when the anger had died out of her, and she had fought and conquered her loneliness—Max's return, and hard words again, and then soft words, and explanations that were no explanations, and tears—not Pauline's tears, and reconciliation. . . . It had always seemed final, like the quarrel. And, like the quarrel, it never was. But the last time it *had* seemed final. Just before the party. When they were planning the party.

It was odd enough, planning anything with Max, who liked to take things as they offered, and hated knowing to-day what he was going to do to-morrow, just as he hated remembering, to-day, what he had done yesterday. He looked at life unsteadily, piecemeal—wanted just enough

In Such a Night

solid ground under his feet to allow him to go on teetering without dropping into the abyss.

But they had planned the party. It represented, to Max, what the new house stood for, too: being set on the road to success. Seriously making the choice he meant to hold to—the position of a man who was getting on in the world, the rich, thick, giddy, satisfying world of affairs, the modern jungle, where one ate or was eaten. Max did not intend to be eaten. Pauline had resisted, at first. She shared his taste for luxury, but she had also a strong need for simplicities. She wanted only so much of the first as she could get without threatening her hold on the second. Difficult, that. But worth trying for. Max was always ready to complicate life, because Max could so easily, with the obvious innocence of his desire, break through any complication, like a clown leaping with a grin through a paper hoop.

Well, but there was the house, which it seemed reasonable enough to take, it being a small one, and with Jimmy wanting a little brother, and Pauline quite happy to give him one, and Max's income so noticeably much bigger than that of most of the men who had started out at about the

Pauline

same time. And there was all the fun of furnishing the house—odd little shops surprised on quiet side-streets, auction rooms where Pauline snooped around, happily fitting what she saw to her private vision of a seductive room.

And having the house, and having made it the quite perfect thing it was, in contrast to the cramped flat and the compromise between purse and taste which had preceded it, what more natural than showing one's friends what one could do, if one had a chance? Pauline's friends were sure to rejoice with her, no matter how much they envied her. A house-warming, that was the pleasant notion. Max had welcomed the idea. Pauline had been a little stupid about understanding why. She had thought he felt about it as she did.

It took him a few minutes to make clear that what he wanted was to cancel certain social obligations of long standing, to corral as many lions as he knew in the charming new drawing-room, and to invite dozens of improbable people from whom he expected or might require favors of sorts. It wasn't Pauline's version of a pleasant evening. It wasn't, of course, Max's, either. But Max saw it as desirable.

In Such a Night

They had had so many quarrels. Pauline knew too well how they ended. But this one was different. This one wasn't a question of Max's fun at Pauline's expense. It wasn't an ordinary attack upon each other, and upon the institution of marriage, and upon their respective antecedents and habits and hopes. It raged, as Pauline with difficulty pretended not to recognize, about a deeper, more fundamental issue.

"You don't want friends," Pauline had said, "you just want people who'll like you enough to foot the bill for your amusements."

"Well, isn't that friendship?" Max had made humorous inquiry.

"You don't really care about anybody," Pauline accused him, "but yourself."

"And you, my love,"—Max corrected her. "Do you think I can support you, in the style to which I plan to accustom you, by shutting business out of my mind when I shut the door of the office? Do you think an evening of chatter with parlor Bolsheviks like your friend Hogarth will provide you with draperies for the library and a squirrel carriage-cover for Jimmy's future frater?"

"You know very well that I don't need a cent

Pauline

of your money to pay for my keep. Jimmy shan't have a brother until he has more of a father than you've cared to be."

"Thanks, dear. A stepbrother, perhaps?" asked Max acidly.

Pauline flamed: "Perhaps you'll give him one—you and Simone Remey! Or whoever your latest is—I don't pretend to keep track."

"It seems that we're not going to want a housewarming," observed Maxwell. "You make it hot enough already. A bit too hot for me, Pauline."

"You can leave, if you like," she suggested, fury and panic and anguish stifling her heart. "You've done it before."

"And who'll pay the rent?"

"That's the first time you ever seemed to worry about that."

And then he had suddenly changed, one of those unpredictable shifts with which you had to be able to deal if you were going to make any effort to keep up with Maxwell: he had come over to her and put one arm around her shoulder, and tilted up her face to his, and said, in the voice that he vainly tried to make her believe she alone heard from him:

In Such a Night

“Darling. Why do we do it? Let’s stop. Darling!”

And she had felt her eyes grow warm and her lashes wet, and all unwillingly had surrendered. To what? To the dread of imagining Max being comforted by Simone for having an independent Xantippe of a wife? To the longing to give Jimmy the little brother, wrapped in squirrel-skins, that he not seldom asked for? To the desire to hear Max’s voice, that low controlled voice with its throb of eagerness, say again: “Darling . . . let’s stop . . . Darling”? She had surrendered. And Maxwell, surprised, she well knew, at her surrender, had compromised on a party at which he would pay his social debts with liquor and lions, and to which he would invite all the prospective customers and helpful seniors he pleased,—a party which would not ignore Pauline’s parlor Bolsheviks, either, nor Pauline’s dowdy feminists, nor Pauline’s struggling lion-cubs, who might prove to be only alley cats, after all. That was the way Max saw her friends, Pauline knew. As to how she viewed his. . . . But then, he “didn’t want friends”. . . . Should she begin it all over again? Oh, dear God, no. She was done.

Pauline

And here they were, in the midst of their party, at the core of their blessed compromise, with everything askew. No astonishment, perhaps. But a weariness of the spirit.

And she must go to find him, to settle what must be settled. To try to rescue the fragments of the party, or of his affection, or whatever most needed salvaging. It was plain that Evelyn couldn't stir, whatever happened. Jimmy might wake up to the appearance, at least, of a baby brother! Pauline chuckled again as this notion struck her. Pauline could nearly always find something funny enough to chuckle over.

The tail of her chuckle was flicking round the corner of her mind when she caught sight of her husband. He was crouched on the steps. Above him sat a woman in a golden gown, a woman whose gold head was bent above his black shoulder. His head in her golden lap. Pauline gave a shrug that was like a shiver; she heard him mutter:

“Darling!”

She turned away abruptly, and ran up the stairs, to such peace as she could snatch in her own room—where Evelyn Mayne lay.

XV

Leonard

LEONARD was puzzled to know if Pauline knew what he wanted of her. Little Paula, sending him up and downstairs and in my lady's chamber—only it wasn't "my lady's." . . . Pauline, standing with her fingers laid lightly, burningly, on his arm. Pauline, blowing him a fragile kiss before she vanished down the hall. . . .

If he hadn't let her go, then. If he had abruptly turned, and seized and held her. . . . He had a kind of grim amusement at his own queer hesitancy. He dismissed it, and began wondering whether the women would soon begin to troop into the improvised dressing-room and flutteringly depart, whether he would find himself trapped there, helping them on with their wraps like a lady's maid, or a lady's man, perhaps?

Someone was coming now. No one he knew—oh, the servant. She'd be bringing the mirror that Pauline had promised. Leonard thought: what

Leonard

does she think of it all? The poor thing looked pale and scared. He went to help her with the clumsy gilt-framed square of glass.

"Gott," she murmured, "I near dropped it."

"That's all right," said Leonard kindly. "Now, where do we hang it?"

He looked about for a nail. There was none. No use resting it on the chair, it would slide and smash. Broken mirrors broke your luck. The girl would think so. Peasant sort, she looked. Pretty, and young. Younger than Pauline, he guessed, young as little Audrey Peacock.

"Here!"

He put it on the high, broad window-ledge. They'd have to twist to see themselves in it properly, but at least it was safe.

The girl stood there, helplessly, not stirring. Perhaps Pauline had given her instructions to wait. Leonard, moving backward, saw her image in the tipped looking-glass: small and plump in her smart gray uniform with the tiny white apron, brown-skinned for all her pallor, brown-haired, brown-eyed. The eyes caught—caught—kept him. Brown shining-soft troubled eyes that stared and asked . . . He put his hands on her rounded

In Such a Night

arms, soft through the thin cotton sleeves, as upon a child. She sobbed as he kissed her.

"There," he said, as to a child, gently, "there, never mind—it's all right now, isn't it?"

All wrong, of course. If Pauline had seen him, kissing her servant . . . If Maxwell Peacock had been standing in the doorway . . . Leonard felt himself go hot and red. And the girl, what was she thinking now? But one couldn't act sanely on a night like this. Or could one?

She fumbled for a handkerchief she didn't have. Leonard stuffed his big one into her hands. Her hands had fine black cracks at the finger-tips; the skin was rough and ugly. She wiped her eyes gracelessly, then smoothed her hair and straightened, with those hardened fingers, her crisp little cap.

"Ach!" she said. "Excuse . . ."

"Don't mind," Leonard repeated. "We're all a bit queer to-night."

The girl gave him a glance of mixed gratitude and embarrassment and pain. She had wanted comfort, and he had given it to her, but it had been sweet: she wanted it again. Soothing the frightened child, he had roused the feverish woman. He pat-

Leonard

ted her shoulder awkwardly, and relieved her of his handkerchief. Women, he thought savagely, were the devil.

He was irritated by the knowledge that Maxwell, seeing him kiss the girl, would have thought that he did it, as Max would have done it, out of sheer weakness. Of course, Leonard couldn't expect the girl herself to understand that the brief contact of their lips had been in obedience to an impulse, on his part, of brotherly gallantry. He had been sorry for her. Now he hated her. He hated her because she was making him sorry for her again, and because he didn't want to be. She had been fretted and excited by the coil of the evening's events, as little Audrey might have been, and she had wanted to sink her discomfort in another sort of excitement. He wasn't prepared to give her that sort. He was fretted himself, and excited. Oh, damn!

He wished he could always look at people not as individuals but as potential caterers to his pleasure, or disturbers of his peace. Then he would have seen the neat gray uniform and the cap and apron that were the girl's insignia of service, instead of those rich brown eyes that might have

In Such a Night

been Audrey's. He ran his fingers back through his hair, mussing it, in his habitual gesture of distress. Better go and find Audrey, and comfort *her*. He'd left her when he saw Pauline, hadn't he? What a mess he was making of everything!

And then he caught sight of a pair of strange eyes in the mirror, amused and scornful and a bit sorry. . . . But that was why he kept thinking of the child: they were Audrey's eyes. How long had she been standing there, anyway? And what did she want? Him? Or only her wraps? He smiled at the mirrored face, but when he turned to speak to her she was gone.

He turned to the other girl, the servant, with a shrug. She answered him with a soft giggle, and he took that for dismissal. He left the room.

In the hall he was almost thrown down by a hurried distracted figure with auburn hair in a ruffled crest. Will Mayne. The man brought up short, muttered, "Sorry," quite as though he didn't give a damn, and then, recognizing Leonard, hooked arms with him and said urgently:

"Let's get out of here!"

It was only natural for a nightmare to be peopled with madmen.

Leonard

"Where do we go?" asked Leonard.

Mayne jerked back his head so that his reddish Vandyke pointed for a second toward the roof. But they were going, apparently, to the cellar.

"I can't stand it," Mayne muttered, dragging Leonard down the stairs.

Your wife's damn well got to, thought Leonard silently.

In the kitchen Mayne stopped, and closed the door on the two of them. He dropped, straddling, on a chair, and rested his head an instant on the arms he crossed over the chair-back. When he raised his white face it was twisted into the semblance of a smile.

"Don't do it!" he cautioned Leonard. "I don't care how keen you are, don't do it! You'll never forgive yourself."

For God's sake, thought Leonard, did he drag me down here to warn me against taking Pauline? . . .

The impossibility of such a situation was less patent to him than the humor of it. But he managed to ask, as a means of stopping the man somehow:

"How's Evelyn?"

In Such a Night

"God knows," said Mayne in a blasphemous voice. "Grimm's with her now. . . . But don't give a woman a child, I tell you! It's plain hell."

They'd managed, then, to get hold of the doctor.

There was a pause. Mayne was trying to recover himself. Leonard, to help the poor devil, took idle inventory of the kitchen. It was, to him, not altogether a foreign province. A man of meager means, and a celibate, he knew how to cook. It was an art that seemed to him part of every intelligent male's equipment. He prided himself on his spaghetti milanaise, on his puffy marigold-colored omelettes, on his Greek salads. But he was used to preparing his messes in a narrow cubby-hole of a place, on a single gas-burner, with no elbow-room between the sink and the shelf he used as a table. Or, in the open, over a wood-fire huddled between stones he had placed with his own hands. This was different. The enormous stove, the shining oilcloth on the floor, the glittering enamel surfaces, the beaming pots, the heavy old cuckoo-clock on the wall—that would be Pauline's notion—the garish girl eating crimson cherries over a staring calendar: that would be the cook's taste.

Leonard

All this was pitched in a strange key, the key of smug domesticity that Leonard couldn't like.

He couldn't, he supposed, like anything in this house. And yet, essentially, there was nothing wrong with it. This kitchen, for instance . . . He admired perfection. It was a perfect kitchen. Why should he prefer mean disorder to this neatly appointed workshop? Why should he try to take Pauline away from the serene setting this basement room echoed and oddly emphasized, to ask her to scrape along in an old flat; eat the products of a kitchenette; wear clothes with no style so that they wouldn't look out-moded the second season, or the third; miss the climax of the play from a poor seat instead of greeting the world and his wife at first nights? But wasn't she, in another sense, missing the play, by living in this house with Maxwell? Wasn't Maxwell offering her what Belasco offered his audiences: solid reality in the properties and no stuff in the piece? Wouldn't she rather see Shakespeare, with a placard telling her what the set was, than witness a perpetual musical show, with real diamonds on the ballet-slippers? But what could he offer her, truly? The pettiness of daily living and dying to

In Such a Night

smutch their candid hours like fog? The scorn and fury of relatives—who is born into the world alone? And to salt this porridge, the meager income of an honest author. Leonard groaned.

“Don’t do that!” said Will Mayne sharply, and brought Leonard back to the wretchedness of the man on the kitchen chair gnawing his nails.

Leonard thrust his fists into his coat pockets and began tramping up and down the room.

Mayne scraped his chair along the floor, twisting round in a more conversable attitude.

“Did you hear her?” he asked.

“Couldn’t help it, with both doors open,” said Leonard, not unkindly. He added: “It’s only the usual thing, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” muttered Mayne, rubbing his hands together, as though to warm them, “it’s usual.”

For a little there was no sound but the sound of Leonard’s soles hitting the oilcloth and the ticking of the cuckoo-clock on the wall. Then Leonard said:

“You had medical training, didn’t you? You’ve seen it before?”

“Yes,” said Will Mayne, “I did. I have. But

Leonard

I've been away from all that for years. And anyway, when it's your own wife, it's different."

He stared lonesomely before him.

"She's a wonder," he murmured.

Leonard, who pitied Evelyn Mayne only as he might have pitied any suffering creature, let that pass.

Will Mayne continued to stare unhappily at nothing. He talked, not to Leonard, but to the air, to himself.

"I'm—just no good," he said. "What good is any man? I don't mean, that is, well—when you came for me I was with that woman, the gold one—" he hesitated for Simone's name. Leonard supplied him with it. He went on:

"What was it but a flirtation? A platonic flirtation, you might say. But all the time, Evey . . ." he stopped, as though a wave of pain had mounted chokingly to his lips. He stretched his neck, as though lifting his head out of water. "We've been damn happy," he said mournfully.

"You've been damn lucky then," volunteered Leonard.

"Eh?" Will Mayne roused a bit. "Oh. Yes." But he didn't really believe it.

In Such a Night

Leonard wondered if anyone could translate his happiness into terms intelligible to another. What was happiness? Might as well ask what is truth. He couldn't go on with his thoughts because Mayne's hoarse whisper kept interrupting:

"It's this goddamn work of mine. All these women. They fall in love with you. You can't help it. You can't stop it. You mustn't stop it, or they'd stop coming. Evey was never jealous. She understood."

Leonard observed that Mayne talked of his wife in the past tense, as though she were dead. Women did die in childbirth. Suppose—no, don't suppose. In his present state Mayne might be uncannily aware of what you were thinking.

"Oh, God, it's not fair!" cried Mayne.

Whom was he accusing? Himself, for his apparently innocent disloyalties toward Evelyn? Or Nature, for shoving all the burden on the woman? Or fate, for arranging that his child should be born in a strange house, among people who did not really care for him or for his child, amidst the distractions of a gayety impeached by this event? Or . . .

Leonard

"Not fair to the child, you mean?" Leonard inquired.

Mayne hadn't, obviously, meant that. Life came into his face as curiosity came into his blue eyes.

"What d'you mean?"

Leonard halted before the stove and folded his arms, his head bent so that their eyes did not meet. He was thinking. Of the world into which children were coming, the children fathered by his own generation. Of the nurseries where they would be playing with toy soldiers, which they called Germans, just as, a hundred years back, the tin men with guns had been the French led by the monster of Elbe. Of all the death-making mechanisms that were being perfected in marvelously equipped laboratories. Of the mines and mills, of the farmlands, of the lumber country, where men with big feet, fists, and shoulders, men living on dirty memories and sullen hopes, men of short speech and scornful songs, worked and begot their kind, and whored and suffered, and sometimes fought, and died. Of the little life of the individual, crowded with pains and defeats and moving steadily toward decay and oblivion. Of the long life of the race, repeating, in more complicated

In Such a Night

and agonizing forms, the struggles and follies and plagues of other ages. He saw air-planes circling over the tombs of the Pharaohs; saw subway exits vomit forth their squirming mobs; saw senators—not Roman—listening pompously to a sound like rushing waters that was London coming through the air, and that turned out to be a restaurant orchestra; saw out-of-works listlessly watching a giant crane spoon up rocks; saw a white hearse with a child's coffin move at a trot through tenement canyons; saw the prisons and hospitals and barracks and cemeteries of the world pressing up about the cradle of one new-born infant, crowding, bending, crushing it among them to a mere stifled cry, to nothing.

"I mean," he said, and stopped. He couldn't say this to Mayne. He couldn't say anything. But he was suddenly conscious that he wanted never to bring a child into this world.

And underneath this consciousness was the mocking knowledge that he would keep faith with life, that for all its evil, it was too good to lose, too miraculous to deny another.

Mayne rose, shaking himself, stretching nervously.

Leonard

"I must go back, upstairs," he said.

"Well," said Leonard, glad he was going.

At the door Mayne swung round, facing him.

"If Pauline's with Evelyn, I'll send her down," he said. "You'll tell her, won't you,—how I feel about all this happening here this way?—I can't."

Leonard nodded:

"That's all right, old man, don't worry about that. And you needn't send Pauline down. I don't, that is, she may be able to help you upstairs, you see, and . . ."

Leonard was afraid to face her. But why? He must have it out with himself, first. But Will Mayne had vanished before Leonard was sure he understood. A little whirr startled him.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo," cooed the clock on the wall. "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo."

XVI

Audrey Peacock

IT did sound as though someone were being murdered. Audrey's imagination raced about trying to capture a reality to which that fearful noise could attach itself. If a thief had got in, and been caught in Pauline's room, and were threatening somebody—the maid, maybe—and she screamed . . . Or if someone were having delirium tremens—Tommy Lucas, perhaps . . . Audrey thought it might be delirium tremens. Because there wasn't any panic. If it were a bandit . . . And this nice old man, who appeared when Leonard went over to Pauline, he didn't seem a bit disturbed. He wasn't such an old man, really. A man of the world. Men of the world weren't ever disturbed by anything, ever. He was very nice, really. And he danced so *well*!

Audrey, in the sure easy clasp of Mortimer Gambel's arm, glanced up at him from under lowered lids, flutteringly. A squarish head, with shin-

Audrey Peacock

ing gray hair *en brosse*, smooth-shaven cheeks, the flesh below the gray-blue eyes thinly threaded with the fine purple lines that bespeak good living, a white moustache over the firm lips, a jutting chin. Mr. Gambel. Audrey had heard Max talk of Mortimer Gambel. Max thought a lot of him—or was it that he thought a lot of Max? Either way, it was all right. It made Mr. Gambel come alive, out of all this rather crazy but awfully exciting crowd at Max's party. Audrey was distinctly pleased to be dancing with Mr. Gambel. And the little nervousness that kept plucking at her because of the scream, there was something approaching pleasure even in that. And the small ache she felt when she thought of Leonard Hogarth, whom she was playing at being in love with, well, there was a thrill there, too.

They danced and danced.

And then there was another, fainter cry, muffled by the music and the voices and the shuffle of dancing feet. Audrey felt a tremor. Mr. Gambel's hand on her back tightened, reassuringly. She noticed people noticing the scream. It hurt her, for Max. Too bad that his party should be injured this way. Couldn't Pauline have taken care of it somehow?

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She was the hostess. Audrey, mildly jealous of Pauline, and mildly ashamed of her jealousy, looked up again at Mr. Gambel:

"Is it delirium tremens?" she asked.

Mr. Gambel looked down into her eyes, kindly, searchingly. His eyes were gray-green, not gray-blue, she saw now, and cool, but friendly.

"I'm not sure that it is," said Mr. Gambel, "but it needn't bother us, need it?" And he smiled.

Audrey supposed not. But he was harder than his eyes made her believe—Mr. Gambel.

"I don't like things I can't explain," volunteered Audrey, with a shake of her little blonde head. She *did* want this evening to be as smooth as it was thrilling, like a snappy creamy drink—what did Max call it? oh: *crème de cacao*.

"My dear little girl," said Mr. Gambel in his soft, tingling voice—a voice that was like *crème de cacao*—"what a lot of things there must be that you don't like!"

He was making fun of her! Audrey was annoyed. He *was* an old man, if he did that. She pouted in silence.

"Does it work the other way, too?" asked Mr. Gambel. "Do you like the things that you can

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explain? Do you like, for instance, aah—" he paused, he glanced down at her again, he looked as though he were going to smile, and didn't—"Do you like being liked?"

Audrey cheered up. He was rather fun, after all.

"Oh, everybody likes that, I guess," said Audrey. And then, correcting herself, with a flush, as she thought of Tommy Lucas's moist kisses: "If the people that like you are sober."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Gambel. "Oh. Ho, ho, ho, ho!"

Was he laughing at her again? But he stopped laughing, and said quite seriously:

"You don't expect people to look at you and keep sober, do you?"

Audrey dimpled and twinkled. This was much more fun than the extravagant love-making to which her contemporaries had accustomed her. When the boys looked at her with moony eyes and stuttered her praises, or tried, without success, to take her by storm, Audrey merely grew cold and thoughtful and malicious. But when a white-moustached man, with a monocle swinging debonairely from his waistcoat, and gray-green eyes that must

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have appraised so many women—when Mortimer Gambel said sweet nothings, then Audrey was touched and giddy. It wasn't just because he thought so well of Max, was it, that he was treating Max's sister to these glances? But how silly! He didn't even know she was Max's sister. She wouldn't tell him. Max thought an immense lot of Mr. Gambel. Max would be impressed if he knew. So would Pauline.

The music stopped. The dancers halted. Someone hunted for another record. The music began again. But it wasn't jazz this time; it wasn't dance music at all; they'd made a mistake: it was a song. The music shuddered through her: something familiar and sorrowful, something she'd heard too often at song recitals, something she disliked for that reason; something that still had power to hurt her, something she liked for that reason . . .

"Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind. . . ."

Someone said:

"Oh, we don't want that. Take it off!"

And then someone else said:

"No. It's Schumann-Heink. Listen:"

Audrey Peacock

"Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?"

"Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?

Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif? . . ."

The music went on. Fearful, thrilling, tragic-sweet. Audrey was rather glad. She allowed Mortimer Gambel to draw her off into a corner where the rich voice of the cantatrice came to her like cloud-diluted sunlight. She gave herself up to the luxury of baseless melancholy.

". . . gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir. . . ."

"Do you understand it: the German?" asked Mortimer Gambel softly.

"A little," Audrey whispered.

"You darling child, come, follow me, the loveliest games I'll play with you," he translated. But it was not translation. He was inviting her. But where? To what? He looked fantastically like the Elf-King as he leaned toward her out of the shadow, his eyes queerly bright. His eyes frightened her.

"Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind!"

"Be quiet, stay quiet, child," he said softly.

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The music trailed tremblingly after them. He lifted Audrey's hand, and kissed it, gently.

She was soothed, and troubled. She had been kissed before. She had sometimes given kisses, little soft forgetful ones. But no one had ever taken her hand just that way. No one had looked at her that way, before. His touch, his bright eyes, were queerly like the music, as though the music had taken on body and color, the music, wild and tender and terrifying . . .

"You'll get your cloak," he whispered, "and we'll run away, like the Elf-King and the little boy. You look rather like a little boy, you know," he added, and his finger-tips just traced the curve of her cheek. Fascinated, she saw her face reflected in his shining eyes, the small blonde head looked strange to her. She had a hypnotized sense of having been metamorphosed into a boy, and this man with the winey breath and the bristling eyebrows and the velvet touch *was* the Elf-King. . . .

Audrey gave a little gaspy laugh.

"And if I do?" she asked archly. But her coquetry was mere habit. She was no longer Audrey, she was a scared adventurous little boy.

Audrey Peacock

He had not released her hand. He was playing with her fingers.

"And if you do," he answered, "I'll take you to the Elf-King's palace, and feed you on elfin cakes, and dress you in silver and gold—no, I shan't: I'll dress you in the sheerest cobwebs of lace . . ." His voice tangled in his throat. He recovered: "And let you sleep in the Elf-King's bed. . . ."

"Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau. . . ."

"Oh," said Audrey, "no!"

"I'm joking," he said in a quite ordinary voice. But just then the music changed:

"Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt,
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt!"

She shivered.

"Won't you run away with me?" he asked wistfully. He had released her hand. He looked so earnest and reproachful, for all the brightness of his eyes.

Audrey caught her breath, barely nodded.

He blew her a kiss as she rose to slip away for her cloak.

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She moved a little dizzily across the room, trying not to be noticed. She was no longer Audrey—she was a doomed little boy.

Outside the little room under the stairs she paused a moment, suddenly reflective. It was rather funny to be running away from Max's party like this, even with Mortimer Gambel. She faced the strange thought that after all Mortimer Gambel didn't know who she was, didn't know that her name was Audrey Peacock, didn't guess that she was Max's sister. If he had known, would he have? . . .

The question trailed off unanswered. Through the half-open door of the room under the stairs Audrey glimpsed the strong blue velvet of her cloak, glimpsed the reflection of it in a mirror tilted on the broad window-sill, and in the mirror saw a man's familiar head bent above—above the white-capped head of Martha—two slightly hairy hands clasping firmly her gray-sleeved arms—his lips pressed against hers. Oh, Oh! Audrey, her hand stretched toward a door-knob that wasn't there, stood quiet with wretchedness. Leonard—kissing a servant. Leonard kissing Max's servant. Suppose, Audrey scolded herself, you'd seen him

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kissing Max's wife; would that be any better? And a queer little voice in Audrey that she didn't recognize whispered "yes." All evening—and before this evening—Audrey had dimly dreaded catching Leonard and Pauline alone together. Partly because she was herself half in love with Leonard, partly because of Max. But this was different. Cheap and ugly. She stood staring, not at the reflection, but at little Jimmy's headless duck. "Poor duck," she murmured, but whether she was addressing the wooden toy or Jimmy, who had to grow up into such a horrid world, or, with deeper pity, herself, she couldn't have told. She looked up again into the mirror, half against her will, and saw that she had been seen. Leonard's eyes—inquisitive, pained, smiling . . . Well. She looked away, swung on her heel, retreating.

But at the library door she paused again. Mr. Gambel. She had forgotten. He would be waiting. With his car. The Elf-King. She heard hurried steps behind her: Leonard, arm in arm with Will Mayne, rushing foolishly downstairs. She was safe now in going for her cloak.

When she entered the little room under the stairs, she found it empty. She took the soft blue

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cape from the clothes-tree and wrapped it tenderly about her shoulders. She whipped out her gold vanity-case and powdered her pert nose. She tweaked and poked at her yellow hair. With a tiny silver comb she smoothed her thin blonde brows. She thrust out her chin, humped one shoulder, drawing her wrap into more graceful folds, smiled at herself with pride and a kind of scorn. She stood in the doorway, waiting. Her heart was beating ridiculously. Anything might happen. She hoped Max wouldn't come along: the Elf-King didn't know she was his sister.

Perhaps she should go to find him? But someone was coming. Audrey felt vaguely the necessity for being furtive. She stood still, hoping it wasn't Max, or Pauline, trying to look strong and self-assured and not tremble. It was the golden woman, the Broadway person, Simone Remey. As she swept into the improvised dressing-room, Audrey gave her a shy smile that was meant to be bright and hard. But Simone Remey seemed not to notice her. She went directly to the mirror and stared at herself as though she were quite alone. Then she took a scrappy lace handkerchief and patted the corners of her eyes. Audrey, pretending not to

Audrey Peacock

watch, and unable to keep her back turned to the woman, seemed to see with the side of her face. Simone Remey's vanity-case was even smaller than her own, and was studded with colored stones. Simone Remey used a powder-cloth and then an eyebrow pencil and a lip-stick. Audrey had a lip-stick in her case, but she had not yet brought herself to use it. Sharply, Simone snapped up her pretty tools. Then she faced Audrey.

"Well, child," she said smoothly, "did you enjoy the performance?"

Audrey was puzzled. She couldn't have meant her play, could she? And certainly she didn't mean this business of make-up. Or did she? Audrey took refuge in another smile. Simone Remey, though she smiled back, looked angry. Audrey wished Mr. Gambel would appear. Somehow she hesitated about leaving Simone abruptly, as she wanted to do. Simone looked hard at her cloak.

"You're not leaving so early, surely?" asked Simone.

Audrey didn't feel as though she were leaving: this running away with the Elf-King was only an extension, a kind of heightening, of the party. She shook her small yellow head.

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"But your cloak, my dear," said Simone, with an odd harshness, as of reproof, in her rich voice.

Audrey, restraining herself from peering for Mr. Gambel, and wondering why this woman had the power to make her so uncomfortable, said hurriedly:

"Oh—it's—seventh inning: stretch!"

"Ah?" Simone arched her brows. She laid a hand, a hand so much older than her face, on Audrey's arm. "Don't," she warned her, "let Tommy Lucas victimize you."

"I'm not going with *him*," cried Audrey, angered into confession, as—she saw it too late—Simone had meant her to be. "I'm going with Mr. Gambel."

"Mort Gambel," murmured Simone, familiarly. And then, on another note: "Why, my dear, you must be mistaken. Mort left—just a few minutes ago. I saw him jump into the taxi myself."

Audrey covered her chagrin by pretending to see if the paste buckle on her slipper were coming loose. Suppose he had gone . . . Suppose he had forgotten all about her . . . "You darling child, come follow me. . . . And let you sleep in the Elf-King's bed . . ." "Oh, no!" she had ex-

Audrey Peacock

claimed. "I'm joking," from him, and then: "Won't you run away with me?" Perhaps he had gotten tired, waiting. Perhaps he had been joking all the time. She hadn't realized how much she wanted this adventure until Simone Remey thus closed the door on it for her. It would have made up for so many things: for being too young, for Pauline's superior sophistication, for Tommy Lucas's insupportable attentions, for Leonard's coldness, for . . . She had been trembling with frightened excitement a moment since. She was shaken with shame now. She dared not slip off her cloak lest Simone see that she believed herself deserted. And yet what else was there to do? She couldn't leave alone, and go—where? Home? She straightened, shoulders back, chin up, careful not to hold it too high: that would be a sign of hurt again.

"There's some mistake," she said quietly, and nodded good-by. She would go, she was going, alone. . . .

"I was beginning to be worried. . . ." A gruff, kind, male voice, a tall, rather thick-set, gray-haired man in an opera cape, with an opera-hat in his hand . . . beaming quizzically through his

In Such a Night

monocle, Mortimer Gambel. Then he hadn't gone after all!

Audrey's relief was mixed with wonder at the wiles of Simone Remey—that they *were* wiles she knew not only by the remembrance of Miss Remey's tone but by the shrug of her powdered shoulder as she turned away. Why had she done that?

And wonder and relief were charged with yet another feeling, surging up to overwhelm her: terror terror terror. . . . He didn't know who she was,—she didn't know who he was, really,—the Elf-King. . . . “Das Kind—war *tot!*”

“I'm coming,” muttered Audrey hastily.

“Ah, that's right!” Mort Gambel took her arm, squeezing it softly above the elbow.

They went out together into the unquestioning night.

XVII

Leonard

AS the last note of the twelfth "cuckoo" voice died on the air, Leonard swung about dejectedly and dropped onto the kitchen chair where Will Mayne had slumped a minute ago. He sat astride, clutching the chair-back, and stared blindly at the hard innocence of the white wall facing him. He must think. But between him and thought came a troop of distracting images—the appeal in the servant girl's eyes as he met them in the mirror; the disordered bed-table in Max's room with the studs and the scribbled gray card; the way young Audrey had bent her yellow head when he asked, "Is there anyone you're afraid of?"; the misery of apprehension in Will Mayne's white face; Tommy Lucas stumbling in drunken rage out of the drawing-room, saying, "It's a damn party"; the funny little beak-nosed man beating his crisp shirt-front with a knuckly fist; Jacob on the street taking his arm and gaily bidding him,

In Such a Night

"Come to my exhibition to-morrow." . . . To-morrow—this was to-morrow. . . .

Those floating images were a screen interposed between him and his decision, between him and Pauline. That was it: he couldn't visualize Pauline. It was as though she had died. He thought suddenly of his mother. She *had* died during the war, while he was off on a cruiser. He had known nothing about it until after she was buried. He had tried not to see her face as it would have looked in death. That was the way the living murdered their dead. And then, when he had wanted to remember how she looked, alive, he had been helpless. She became insubstantial—not even the memory of her voice stayed with him. It had seemed shameful at first—a final cruelty towards her. For he had not loved her. Instead of affection, he had given her admiration of her courage and resource. She had needed all her bravery when his father died—in a time too distant for Leonard to recall—when she had repudiated the help that her wealthy relatives-in-law had offered, and worked and stinted and brought up her child single-handed. But that struggle had killed something in her, a subtlety, a delicacy that she must

Leonard

have had buried somewhere in her as a girl. She had been proud of her son, and sacrificed herself to him, but there had been no sympathy between them. He had treated her with a warmth of filial courtesy that she may well have mistaken for love. He tried to reconstruct an image of her by recalling little things: she had had gray hair of that ugly indeterminate shade that some blondes fade into; she had worn eye-glasses; she had had a small double chin; her hands had been little and plump and firm; she had worn blue a lot—navy blue serge, because her eyes were blue and navy serge was economical. But all this was no use. He couldn't realize her presence. She was no longer a person. She was more dead than death. He could not even give her the pitiful immortality of remembrance.

It had happened to him with other people, too. There was Muriel Vorse. The girl he had loved when he was very young. Gay times, then. Parties, not like this. Dancing—that New Year's Eve, dancing till dawn. The kiss she had given him while the clock struck twelve—they had run out then, breathless, hand in hand, under a snatched Indian blanket, like Paul and Virginia, into the

In Such a Night

frosty back yard of the little old house, and stood freezing and passionately happy under the thick-starred heavens. She was married now, and lived in the suburbs with her babies and a dull respectable husband, or maybe she had divorced him? Anyway, Leonard never saw her. And he couldn't recall her face. It had been pale and long, he knew, and she had had yellow hair and green eyes and a chin cleft with a dimple. But this knowledge could not make him see her. Strange, that a face could be dear, and unremembered.

And Briss . . . Old Oscar. He could have had anything he wanted, Oscar Brissenden. Briss, who knew everything without trying to learn. Briss, who never talked when he could keep silent. Rhodes Scholar, if he'd cared to be. But he wasn't ambitious that way. Or any way. Only curious, voraciously curious. They'd bummed around together, how many years? Two? Three? Five? And then the war. And Briss, resolute and dumb, a conscientious objector. Leonard afraid for him, respecting him. Leonard immensely relieved because Briss was going with the Quakers to Russia. But on the way he stopped off in London—Briss smashed in an air-raid, before he saw anything

Leonard

of the war, or of life, for that matter. One hand gone, and blind. Briss, who could remember pages of a book he'd read only once—no more books now. What was he doing? He hadn't had any money. Worked his way through the university. Leonard hadn't seen him since. Briss kept off his old friends. Leonard had tried to find him again, but it was no use. He wasn't in New York any longer, that was certain. Leonard tried to visualize his face with the maimed eyes. But Leonard's memory was blind, too.

Slowly, the kitchen swung back into his striving vision: the white wall, the carved wooden cuckoo-clock ticking noisily, the sharp stiff pattern of the oilcloth on the floor. And now that comparatively clear past, Mother, Muriel, Briss—that fine time of cramming and loafing and being a kind son; that time when books had been precious, and parties jolly, and the future dimly immense with promise—that time melted into this present: the house-warming, the birth, the hide-and-seek he was playing with love and Pauline.

She stood now, in the doorway, like a dream materialized, but with an oddity about her. . . . It was the things she was holding that made it:

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the strictly gleaming lines of murderous surgeon's tools, sticking out of a towel that she clasped as she might have clasped a baby.

He swung to his feet and went to take them from her.

"Thanks."

With that easy swiftness that he loved in her she took a sauce-pan from the wall, dropped the instruments into it, covered them with water, and set the queer-looking pot on the gas-flame. She made such small noise. She moved with the grace of a dancer. Then she dropped into a chair and smoothed her eyes with the tips of her fingers. When she looked at him again she was smiling.

"Aren't doctors crazy?" she asked. It was, he recognized, a rhetorical question. "D'you know what Grimm wanted to do? He was going to give those things—" she waved a hand, the gesture was a shudder, toward the kettle of instruments, "to Will Mayne to boil! Oh, Lord!" She laughed her tender lucid ripple. "I snatched them just in time. As though Will weren't all in, without that. And then he was cross,—the doctor, I mean, because he had wanted to give Will something to keep him busy. Oh, men!"

Leonard

Leonard hovered by the stove, fascinated, and afraid to peer.

"If it's just a ruse, to get Mayne out of the way, what d'you want to boil 'em for?"

The doctor must be a fool. Under her amusement, Pauline was surely frightened. A vague compassion for Will Mayne, a fear for Evelyn, was smothered in a desire to comfort Pauline.

She shrugged one shoulder.

"But it's not as bad as that," said Leonard gently.

"It's always bad." Her face was queerly haggard.

He thought, with a twinge, of Jimmy. She must be thinking of him, too. Leonard's nervous stalkings of the kitchen stopped. He halted in front of her, his fists clenched in his coat pockets. His voice, when it came, surprised him with its hardness.

"Pauline."

Jimmy or no Jimmy, he must have it out with her. It was as if the whole mad night had been pushing him forward to this moment. He had the odd conviction that he was acting in a dream.

She half closed her eyes.

"Oh, don't," she whispered.

In Such a Night

"I must," said Leonard firmly, but it seemed to be not his own voice, rather something speaking *through* him. Pauline, sitting there on the kitchen chair, her hands folded in her lustrous red lap, her pale oval face under the cloudy hair looking almost asleep in its muteness, was scarcely alive, scarcely real.

"We've pretended too long," he said in a low tone that sounded harsh to his ears. "It's got to stop some time. It might as well be to-night." The word "to-night" gave him the thrill of a weak electric shock. It defined their position for a second like a lightning flash. And in a second all was obscure again.

Pauline murmured, "Please . . . Leonard. . . ."

"It's not," he pursued, "as though you liked it. You hate it. Maybe you don't hate—Maxwell," he slurred the name; "but you must hate what he stands for. Unless he's spoiled you, made you over into his own image. Good God, Pauline, can't you see it: Evelyn upstairs fighting for life, for new life, and your house full of people who are too drunk to realize it, or who are furious because her fate happens to divert them from the business of getting too drunk to realize anything? I'm no

Leonard

Puritan. I don't put their damned souls above their doomed bodies. But they don't even regard their bodies. They're nihilists, if you like. Nothing's sacred to them—not even their own pleasure, because they kill their capacity for pleasure. . . . I don't care about them. Let them make their own little hells. It's you. . . . To see you catering to them, and petting them, and wasting yourself on them—to see you on the edge of falling into the pit with them . . . D'you think you can keep out?"

"Are you trying to save my soul?" asked Pauline.

Leonard heard the water boiling in the pot behind him, the clock ticking grimly on the wall. His face hurt when he smiled, as though it were a mask he was twisting into an unintended grimace.

"I'm trying to deliver it," he said. "Spiritual obstetrics." He ached at his own cleverness. Shut up, he told his wit—oh, shut up!

"Listen to me," he begged her. "I know what you think. I know what—Maxwell thinks." (Couldn't he say that name ever, without a pause?) "They aren't all dumbbells and wasters, that crowd upstairs. You've collected your celebrities.

In Such a Night

You've got, heaven save the mark, the makings of a twentieth-century salon up there. But what's the use of it? *Pour écraser l'infâme?*" He laughed shortly. "We used to talk about the good life. You think, you darling fool, that you can live the good life with your mind alone, and if you entertain angels with awareness, you're at liberty to go prosperously to the devil."

Pauline stood up. Was she trying to run away? He hadn't expected the words to pour out of him like that. She took the kettle from the fire, set it on the back of the stove, and turned off the gas-flame.

"You're unique, my dear," she murmured. And laughed: "Leonard, lover of my soul . . ."

He moved toward her, his arms feverish to go round her.

"God knows I am your lover," he cried softly.

She faced him then, her mouth was grave: "You'd better go," she said.

"With you," he said.

She shook her head.

"What are you here—a fixture, part of his furniture of existence? You wouldn't tell me to go," he accused her, "if you didn't care."

Leonard

It was strangely as though they were rehearsing a scene they had been through together a dozen times before. Only the setting was different.

"But I love—Maxwell," she murmured, not looking at him.

"You loved me," said Leonard, "a second ago, when you told me to go. You did. It's because you're afraid you'll remember him afterwards, and be sorry. It's not that you love him now. Be honest, Pauline."

"How can I be honest," she asked, "when you don't play fair? You talk to me now, when I'm—when Evelyn . . ." She sounded almost angry.

"Why don't you say," he mocked her, "'This is so sudden!'"

Was there ever such a silly love-scene, he asked himself. They were on the verge of a quarrel. But it had always been with Maxwell that Pauline quarreled. The thought frightened him. She *had* loved Maxwell. For how many loves had she room in that unfathomable heart?

"Of course it's not sudden," she acknowledged, her eyes on the kettle of instruments. "But one is such a fool. I thought, somehow, that I could keep

In Such a Night

you, without . . . that you wouldn't want . . . I've liked you, Len, awfully."

"Thanks."

"Don't be bitter. It's hard for me to send you away. Please believe it."

"Then why do you?"

She looked at him then.

"I'm not as 'modern as all that," she said, "I can't have you, both."

He was trembling very much, but his voice was still hard and matter-of-fact.

"Did you think I wanted—that?"

"I know you didn't. Oh, why do we talk and talk? Please go now."

He took her into his arms at last. It was unbearable to stand there watching her sad grave small face. She let him hold her a moment, not stirring either to repulse him or to answer his embrace. It was her quietness that made him release her.

She took up the kettle of instruments. She was going upstairs. She expected him to leave. He would not see her again. Oh, beautiful! Don't do this to me. Don't. A bit of chiffon fell away from her shoulder. He snatched at it, bowed, and

Leonard

brushed it with his lips. It was so sheer that he seemed to be kissing his own fingers. It smelled of stuff and perfume.

"Oh, be careful!" she cried. "This water's boiling hot."

The funny child. The heart-breaking child.

In the doorway she turned.

"You are going?" It seemed to him that the question had come into her voice against her will.

"No, dearest one," he muttered, "not yet."

She shook her head, as though to tell him it was vain for him to wait. She disappeared with her shining cruel sterile tools.

Something whirred ominously in the void stillness:

"Cuckoo."

XVIII

Maxwell Peacock

MAX was feeling sorry for himself. Oh, just a shade. And at the bottom of his self-pity was his pity for Pauline. He had been beating her again. Was it any less wife-beating because it had been done with words only? Why couldn't they live in peace and amity like any other couple? They loved each other. There was no woman in the world quite like Pauline. All his wanderings led him back, as in a circle, to her. And always she was ready, in spite of her pretended angers and reluctances, to receive him. But they were continually at war. He was never able to refrain from lashing out at her. And the whip always swung round and slyly licked him with a fiery sting. It had happened just now. That was why he was saddened with self-pity. He was nursing the wound he had given himself in hitting Pauline.

Of course, she couldn't help it if Evelyn was suddenly seized by her pangs in the midst of the

Maxwell Peacock

party. Evelyn couldn't help it, either. It must make her wretched to think of it, if she was capable of thinking at all. It was Will Mayne's fault, if it was anybody's: he might have known. No one but Will Mayne would do such a fool thing as to bring a woman in Evelyn's condition to an affair like this. And then, vaguely, Max remembered how, when Pauline was carrying Jimmy, he had taken her to the theater, and they had met some people he knew, and Pauline had suggested that they all come home with her and have waffles and coffee, and they had demurred and he, Max, had seconded Pauline's notion, and had pressed them, in fact, until they came, and Pauline had made the waffles and the coffee, with more hindrance than help from the other women, who didn't want to get spots on their gowns in the kitchen, and . . . Oh, damn it all to hell; it hadn't hurt Pauline a bit, she was made of iron. And Jimmy hadn't gotten himself born until five nights later.

Still, if Pauline had worked quickly she could probably have gotten Evelyn out of the house to-night before anyone noticed anything wrong. Called the ambulance or something. Didn't Evelyn

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expect to go to the hospital? And there wouldn't have been all this racket. Those screams . . . Had Pauline screamed that way when Jimmy was coming into the world? Somehow Max felt as though a murder would have been more decent than this naked piece of nature Evelyn had set before his guests. It would have been horrible, but hardly less of a nuisance, and certainly it would have rhymed better with the peculiar kind of excitement engendered by a well-liquored party like this.

He'd worked so hard to have it right. Given Pauline practically *carte blanche* so far as the furnishings of the new place were concerned: she had a pretty taste. And fairly set up his boot-legger for life on the stuff he'd bought, so that people would look at the house and at Pauline and at himself through the properly roseate light. And he'd asked such a thoroughly good crowd. Of course, Pauline had had to have her poor little, drab little, semi-demi artists and professional feminists and dreadful serious-minded parlor Bolsheviks—like Leonard Hogarth. What the devil was he forever hanging about for, anyway?

But Max felt that he'd more than made up for

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Pauline's mistakes by getting Simone Remey to come—she was gorgeous in that gown: gold became her wonderfully; and then there was Tommy Lucas—of course he got tight too quickly, and he hadn't had a chance at the piano, still, there he was; and that fellow Marshak—pity he couldn't have shaved and changed before he came, but then he was almost fashionable enough as a painter not to make that matter; and John Van Anda, who did those smart little middles for the weeklies and every other month illuminated *Vanity Fair* with his fire-cracker irony: he always looked as precise as a tailor's dummy; and there was old Mortimer Gambel—he lent the right air, the proper note, to the whole show. And he was having a good time, too, old Mortimer. Max had seen him dancing with something awfully young and snappy. Old Mortimer would approve of what Max had done for the party. But he wouldn't approve of Evelyn. . . . Had he heard her shriek? How many people *had* heard before the doors were shut, Max wondered gloomily.

He stood leaning against a newel-post in the lower hall, temporarily abandoning his duties as host, to yield to the rather pleasurable melancholy

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of feeling himself abused—by Pauline, perhaps by Fate. After all, he had done his damned best. Pauline was too hard on him. Had always been—hard. When they were first married, and she'd wanted him to give up writing advertisements and go in for writing novels instead—that unfinished novelette that had started her off was still lying in a lower drawer of his desk downtown; he'd never quite had the courage to tear it up. But he knew he couldn't make a go of it. Unless you were a best seller, you couldn't get anywhere with that sort of thing. Pauline had been willing to live on next to nothing, and she'd been so devilish proud about her independence. As though being able to earn enough with her little law grubbing to buy her hats and shoes was any kind of help. And she wanted children. It couldn't be done, that's all. One had to keep up to some standard of living. Well, and because he couldn't be a novelist he'd stuck to advertising, with a mean pain every time he met up with a man like Tommy Lucas, for instance, or a woman like Simone Remey. They *had* done it. And he felt he could do it, too, if he didn't have to take care of Pauline, and Jimmy, and Jimmy's possible brothers and sisters.

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That was what made him go off on a bat and get lit and get sick, the way Pauline couldn't ever really understand, every once in so often—that mean pain, that jealous feeling that he *could*, if he had half a chance. . . . But he'd stuck to advertising, and so he'd had to play up and play the game like every one else. Hadn't old Mortimer Gambel said as much? Not in so many words, of course, but . . . Anyone but a blind ass would see it. Pauline wasn't a blind ass, but she hadn't seemed to see—until lately. She wanted another baby. Perhaps that was why she was beginning to understand.

And still she kept on fooling around with that fellow Hogarth, as much as to say to her husband: "Here is what I wanted you to be." Could Hogarth give her a house like this? And that stunning pair of earrings that were just what she needed to set off the ivory pallor of her face? Could a husband like Leonard Hogarth afford to give her another child? Max was a little sick and angry, as well as sorry.

He felt the first twinges of the mood that generally sent him off and out of the house, to look for some disillusioned crony or some happy-go-

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lucky crowd that would help him to forget the dizzy pain of watching life flow past him so noisily, so rushingly, while he had done nothing, planned nothing, made nothing. . . . What was a publicity man's reputation worth in the courts of Heaven? In that Heaven where painters and musicians and happily sweating slaves of the pen sat laboring to capture the eternal truth of things? And there was all the world to see yet, to taste and smell and feel with tingling finger-tips; to hear and look at, to conquer and yield to, and drown in. It was rushing by, the chance to write the too-long-denied book that would show that he knew to its core the life of which he was wildly amorous. It was rushing by—life itself, the arms of his lover, his mistress, the warm clean scent of his little naked son, the feel of power in his own swelling muscles as he leapt to smash a ball over the net or pulled at the paddle in a cool drench of moonlight; the sweetness of food crunched between his teeth or of liquor running smoothly past his palate; the chance to go down to the sea in ships, over all the seven seas; to behold the eight wonders of the world; to sway drunkenly across the sands on a sullen-lipped beast toward the

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shadow of the Great Pyramid, or sit in a glow of liqueurs and sunset light on the edge of a Paris pavement while time streamed past without hurt; or camp under the stars, lying like a burden loosed upon the cool breast of the earth, with a tickle of grass under his palm and the churr-churr-churring of a million frail insects beating the rhythm of incessant life. It was rushing past, and soon it would be gone, over forever, and he would no longer feel it or know it or have power to regret it.

Out of the darkness that was engulfing him he reached desperately toward the sheltering unreality of the hour: the twang of dance-music from above stairs, the murmur of moving feet, the sounds of laughter and chaffing voices and clinking glass, the incandescent rose and cream and crocus of lights—lights streaming in every direction, the sudden glimpse of a lady in a golden gown emerging stiffly, like a tall gilt candlestick, from the alcove under the stairs. Max moved then, a little blindly, toward the candlestick, who seemed to have a handkerchief against her mouth. It was Simone.

Simone, in tears?

Max, whose alert imagination had never yet

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painted such a picture for him, doubted the evidence of Simone's queerly aged face. Max, who hated scenes, if he had to participate in them, wished he might avoid Simone. Max, the graceful host, came forward, dropping his private despair as, in another setting, he might have dropped a cigar not to be smoked in a lady's presence, and put a solicitous hand on her arm.

She took the triangle of damp lace from her mouth then, and gave him a stiff smile.

"Yes, Max," she said in a low, harsh voice, "this is me." As if she knew he couldn't recognize the proud shrewd handsome creature he liked to play with in this wounded woman.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Oh-h!" a sigh that was half a sob drifted from her painted lips.

"I've just discovered something horrid," she confessed in a harder tone. "I'm—a cat!"

Max smiled at her encouragingly. Of course you are, he thought under the smile—that isn't what's making you cry.

"Let me tell you what I did just now."

"Remember," he warned her lightly, "anything you say may be held against you."

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She nodded and rushed on:

"There was a child in that dressing-room—a pretty child—said she was going on a bat with Mort Gambel. I'd stepped in there to find a mirror big enough to show me how old I looked when I was miserable. Just that. She made me so furious: little and young and pretty as the devil, standing there pert and gay. . . . I had to hurt someone. I told her I'd seen Mort jump into a cab and go off. I thought it would wilt her. But she didn't blink. And then, of course, Mort showed up, and they went off together."

Simone bit her lip.

"But Mort'll hurt her all right. He looked dangerous, and you could see she was as innocent as—as ice-cream."

"Are you trying to tell me that the female of the species is more deadly than the male?" Max inquired, "or the other way about?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything. I don't know why I did it. I only know it wasn't because I wanted to save her from Mort."

"Pretty pussy!" murmured Max, with teasing affection. "Let's have a drink."

"No," said Simone, unexpectedly sharp. "I've

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had too much already. It's only when I'm half-seas-over that I remember . . . and it hurts too damned much . . . and I get—" she laughed shortly, "vicious: wanting to stick my claws into the unhurt ones. . . . Why, she was almost young enough," Simone's voice creaked, "to be my daughter."

Max took her hand and drew her to the stairs. He made her sit down on one of the treads. He patted her shoulder as he might comfort Jimmy. He had suddenly begun to feel the flattery of Simone's confidence. She must like him awfully if she dared let herself go to him like this. And he was curious, too. What was it she remembered that could torment her so? What sort of man? The only way to forget an old love was to take refuge in a new one, surely Simone knew that. If he were to offer himself as the new lover? He felt tender toward her now, protecting, powerful. . . .

"Tell Max," he said softly.

Seated there in the shadow of the stairs, her gold head thrown back to rest against the balustrade, her hands at rest in the soft gold of her lap, she looked to Max like a tired goddess, a slim

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Demeter ravished of her child, a golden Helen out-wearied with Trojan clamor.

He crouched down at her gold knees, caressing her with his fingers, with his tone, smoothing away her weariness and grief, drawing her to a sense of him beside her, kind and strong and quick with rising passion.

She straightened, and began to talk, not answering his touch, not looking at him—staring ahead of her with wide sightless eyes:

“‘Tell Max’—tell the world—tell God,” she said. “Why not? Simone Remey, the Broadway success . . . Simone Remey, the Queen of the Great White Way . . . Simone Remey, the happy headliner . . . But she isn’t a success, she isn’t a queen, she isn’t happy. She took her happiness and buried it in a little coffin years ago. . . . No, she couldn’t even bury it: she had to kill it before it was real enough to have a coffin.” Her voice changed:

“I’m not maudlin,” she said quietly. “But it’s you who’ve done this thing to me, Max, and so you’ll have to listen. You asked me to come here to-night. You asked—that other woman. That

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woman who's lying upstairs somewhere, behind a closed door, screaming. . . ."

"But, Simone," Max protested.

"No," she said firmly. "You've got to listen. It's not what you think. She needn't hold her noise for me. But it made me remember: that's how I screamed, too—only they wouldn't let me really, for fear someone would hear. The doors weren't as sound-proof as yours. It hurt, like being pulled in two. But it wasn't just the pain. You can stand pain if something's going to come out of it. But to be tortured—to kill something—Hearing her made me remember . . . everything; the man who saved me from having it—he looked like an undertaker—he said, when it was all over: 'There's your fine baby boy!'

"Don't," Simone hurried on, "think I think I made a mistake. God knows I shouldn't have a baby. It would be fun for a while, a cunning play-toy. And then it would be a nuisance. I couldn't take care of it: schools, shoes, scarlet fever. . . .

"But it's as though it never stopped dying, without ever having lived.

"Every time I pass a shop where they're showing children's things, I keep thinking: I wonder

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how he'd look in one of those. Not every time—once in six months, maybe. And then, when I hear women talk—telling smart stories about *their* children—their precious little morons . . .

"I'm a cat, Max," she murmured sobbingly, "a jealous cat, a cat without a kitten. . . . Oh, what a hell of a world!"

"Poor darling," whispered Max.

"I was half foxed," Simone muttered, "and that scream—it was too much, and I spilled over. Sorry."

"We're all of us half foxed," Max answered. "God help us from sobering up." He was pitying, not Simone, but himself; thinking, not of her crime, but his own: the abortion he had committed when he turned the lock on his half-finished book, and, with so small a wrench at his heart, went out with Mort Gambel to lunch.

But it was as though it never stopped dying, that book, without ever having lived. It wasn't as though you could go and put flowers on its grave.

He thought of Pauline: it was her fault that it couldn't die in peace. A woman like Simone would know better. He laid his head on her golden knees.

Pity me, oh, most pitiable woman, lay your

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hands on my head, bless me with your unfulfilled maternity, cover me with your love, as I cover you with my grief. Pray for me, golden goddess, as one delivered over to profane things, you who were delivered profanely. Cherish me, mother me, warm me with the gold of you, there is no other warmth for me on earth. Pity me, I am a child before you. Pity me, I am only a man. . . .

His head was buried in her lap, her hands comforted him with vague caresses.

He could not see, in the hall beyond them, Pauline hovering, and then, seeing them, turn away to leave them to their separate loneliness.

XIX

Leonard

LEONARD heard their voices before he saw them. They weren't speaking loudly, but there was a kind of iron clarity in their tones that made the words carry.

"Good God, what are you doing with those things?"

"If only you'd continued to sit on this landing with your friend you would have seen me a few minutes ago taking them down to boil."

"Is something wrong?"

"Not something: everything."

"Evelyn?"

"You."

Leonard couldn't beat a retreat now. He hated having to face them. He tramped on the stairs. They didn't, wrapped in their private quarrel, notice him.

"Oh, Lord! Can't you cut it for one night?"

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"I might ask you the same question. I must go upstairs."

And he had let her go, for when Leonard saw him he was standing in the hall alone, frowning bitterly at the air.

Leonard warmed to Maxwell because Pauline was furious with him. Poor devil!

But Maxwell, suddenly glimpsing Leonard, gave no sign of wanting his pity. He looked, for a flash, ready to knock him down. Then he said sweetly:

"Whither away, Hogarth?"

Leonard couldn't answer. Too many thoughts choked his utterance. Merely to do something, he felt in his pocket for his cigarette-case and offered it to his host. The humor of their situation twisted his lips into an unfriendly grin.

Have a cigarette? I've just been trying to seduce your wife. But I have to possess her soul before I can honestly desire her body. You wouldn't mind that, would you, Peacock? It's not the seventh commandment I'm breaking, you see; it's not even the tenth. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife. . . . I don't. I covet a woman of my own, not a hostess for my clients or a housekeeper for my pos-

Leonard

sessions. A woman. Flesh and blood and brains. One you've never known. And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bare Cain. You must know a woman, to beget children upon her. You've never known mine because you couldn't even imagine her. Cain was a wanderer and a fugitive; so shall our children be. Wanderers into the undefiled waste places, fugitives from you and your laws. Your friend Gambel's a lawyer, isn't he? Funny. You haven't a good light, there—better take one from me.

Suppose Pauline came down and found them here together. What would she do? How feel?

It shouldn't have happened this way at all. The proper thing was for Maxwell to discover Pauline in his arms. Then there could be a scene, a fight, a decision taken. This way . . .

"Pauline," observed Max, "is on the rampage again."

Leonard noted with oblique amusement that Maxwell was talking to him as one man to another.

"I suppose," he went on reflectively, "it's this damn upset with Evelyn Mayne. You heard, of course?"

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Leonard nodded. Speech was still difficult. Flight impossible.

"Christ, what a night!" sighed Max. "It's a house-warming all right. Thank God to-morrow's Sunday—don't have to go to the office. I feel as though I'd never be cool again."

You won't, if I can help it. But you don't know that—yet. Queer, that I feel cool, now.

Maxwell straightened, as if to meet a disagreeable thought.

"See here, Hogarth, you can do me a favor. Have you seen Audrey about?"

"I was talking to her," Leonard found his voice, and was surprised at its usual sound, "an hour—or a hundred years—ago."

"I'd like," said Maxwell anxiously, "to keep her out of this: she's such a kid, after all. Would you look her up, and—steer her out? Take her home, if necessary."

Leonard suspected that Max did not want so much to protect Audrey as to get him out of the house. Was Peacock afraid of him? That would be a good sign.

"Does she still think that the doctor brings

Leonard

babies in his little black bag?" he asked with malice.

"Oh, hell! What are you made of, anyway?" Max's irritation broke through suddenly and there was a snarl in his eyes.

Leonard was glad. Perhaps they could face each other at last.

"Why," he said mildly, "I'm made of sawdust—didn't you know? Prick me, and it'll all trickle out. But that'll make your house look like a butcher-shop: perhaps you'd better not."

He noticed Max's knuckles whiten, then—at the sound of voices down the hall—the fists unclenched and he gave a short angry laugh. He forced a good-humored tone:

"Perhaps you're right. But . . ."

He turned to play the suave host to whoever was coming toward them. It was Tommy Lucas, arm in arm with a tall blond youth whom Leonard remembered as having companioned Simone when she entered. Tommy's papery face wore a sardonic grin; the youth looked like a frightened child going to confession.

Max said:

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"Hello, Tommy—feeling better?"

Tommy halted, waving an unsteady hand.

"Dear M-M-Max," he stuttered, "want to 'p-pologize. S-S-Sh-shorry. Didn' know she was your shister—but I had t-t-to kish her. . . . Tha's a rhyme, ain't it? Shisher—kish 'er. . . . Nev' min' . . ."

"I don't mind," said Max, "if Audrey didn't. I'm only surprised she let you, Tommy. She used to be more fastidious in her tastes."

"S'all right," said Tommy kindly. "I f-f-for-give you. I f-f-forgive ever'body. But tha's not all. I'm not the only Don-Don-Don Juan here, 't seems. 'S 'nother. N-n-name of G-G-Gambel."

The blond boy began pulling at Tommy's arm, trying to drag him away. Max's hand went nervously to his moustache.

"Well, what of it, Tommy?" he asked.

"S'all right," Tommy repeated. "She's your sister. Gambel's your frien'. No? Simone was s-s-say-in' they went off together. Must'a been Audrey by her description: Don Juan Gambel and li'l Audrey. . . ."

That amusing child, Audrey? She'd hated Tommy's attentions. Leonard recalled how she had

Leonard

blurted the story to him in the library. But Gambel must know Audrey was his host's sister, and he'd treat her accordingly. Only—Audrey was such a child. . . .

"Of course it's all right," said Max coldly. But he flushed.

"Course," said Tommy. "Li'l Audrey—didn't like my kishes—Gambel'll t-t-take c-c-care of her now." He grinned: "There'll be a hot time in the ole t-t-town to-night!"

Arm in arm with the blond youth, he ambled away.

Leonard watched the muscle in Max's cheek moving like a tiny lever.

"You can't thrash a man when he's drunk," Leonard offered.

"*You're* not drunk," Max swung on him with vicious humor.

"No," said Leonard quietly. "If you want to take it out on me? . . ."

It couldn't be only fear for Audrey—what was there to be afraid of?—that was working in Peacock. He must be, Leonard felt, afraid for himself, too. Five minutes ago Peacock had wanted him to take Audrey home; but he hadn't really

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wanted him to take Audrey home—he had wanted him to go—to leave Pauline alone. Audrey was out of the house now. She wouldn't have to learn the truth about Max and Pauline. What would she learn from Mortimer Gambel? "It's been the queerest day!" Audrey had confided to Leonard gaily.

Max's hands hung, clenched, at his sides. The muscle in his cheek flickered continuously.

Leonard thought: you might send Will Mayne to the rescue—he needs a job badly. He felt a flash of pity for Maxwell's impotence. He could do no more about Audrey than he could about Evelyn—or about Pauline. What was it Jacob had said about God? Peacock needed a God, this minute. Without a God, there could be no Devil; without a Heaven, no Hell. Peacock wanted a Hell to which to consign Lucas and Gambel and himself. Poor Peacock.

"Audrey was saying," Leonard offered, "that you have been under the illusion that you have to protect her from her best friends. She thinks it a mistaken policy. . . ."

"Gambel," muttered Max, "isn't one of her best friends. She's never seen him before. And—he thinks he's every girl's 'best friend.'"

Leonard

Leonard understood that Maxwell was talking to himself. Max didn't realize Leonard's presence. He was seeing his sister and Gambel riding away into the night. He wasn't liking what he saw. There was nothing he could do. There is never anything one can do about life, thought Leonard. It's the wild horse one is forever learning to master, but it lands one with a broken neck in the end, the beautiful damned broncho.

"She's only a child," said Max harshly. "Pauline should have looked after her. . . ."

Pauline again! Leonard was ready to storm at that name when he saw her coming down the stairs, a small figure with a stricken face too pale above her red gown.

"Max," she whispered, "oh, Max, it's awful."

"I believe you," said Max sternly. "How could you let her go?"

"Why . . . what? . . . I mean Evelyn. . . ."

"Evelyn!" Max spat out the name. "I'm talking about Audrey. My sister. She's run off with Mortimer Gambel."

"Oh, what does it matter?" said Pauline softly. "You can scold her when she comes back. But—"

Max was suddenly on fire with rage and fear and impotence:

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"How do I know," he choked, "she's *coming* back?"

"Why, Max!" cried Pauline, "you're crazy: Audrey?!"

"Audrey's a baby," said Max. "Audrey's ready to bite on anything you give her. And Gambel's the smoothest, damndest devil that ever went cradle-snatching in a decent house. Don't I know him? God!"

"This isn't a decent house," said Pauline in a queer dull voice, "if you ask a man like that to come into it. He was your friend until he chose to admire your sister. I'm sorry for Audrey." She paused for the space of two breaths. Then she said:

"But Evelyn may lose her baby."

Max stared savagely at his wife as though she were responsible for everything. But Leonard, coming alive, took Pauline into his arms. Maxwell had ceased to matter. If this wasn't a decent house, Pauline didn't belong in it. She must see Evelyn through, that was all; and then . . . He kissed her hair.

She rested against him. Maxwell had ceased to matter for her, too.

Leonard

Leonard realized with a touch of surprise that Maxwell had not ceased to matter to himself, as the man made a motion to tear Pauline from his arms. But Pauline stepped out of the embrace.

"I must go back," she said. And she went back, to Evelyn, to the unborn that was fighting for life.

The big scene is over, thought Leonard, almost ready to smile. The husband has seen his wife in the other man's arms. The die is cast. The battle is on.

And yet . . . the moment had no fierceness in it, somehow. Duels were fought in law-courts nowadays. Would Peacock fight? Leonard noted that the muscle in his host's cheek was twitching again badly. He looked older in some indefinable way—was it his eyes? And he looked sick.

"You can't," said Leonard, "be jealous of a woman you never had. You had the shadow of Pauline, never the substance. You won't miss much, missing the shadow."

He thought he was saying that. The words that came were different:

"Do you want a brandy?"

"Yes," said Max hoarsely, "a good stiff one."

Leonard half expected a curse to follow the

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reply, but none came. He went, obligingly, to fetch the bracer. Picture of a lover, he thought as he turned, playing the good Samaritan to the man he is about to cuckold. It would be different in the books or on the stage, but all literature was a lie.

He was sorry for Peacock. The man was suddenly face to face with his own nakedness. If he hadn't wanted Gambel to give him a leg up in the world. . . . If he hadn't cared more for what he could give Pauline than he cared for Pauline herself. . . . If Pauline hadn't come to him with Evelyn's looming tragedy, that struck her, being a woman, between the eyes, just when Peacock was trying to down, without choking, the news of Audrey. . . . No wonder he was sick.

In the dining-room Leonard found Marshak and beckoned to him.

"Be a good fellow," he said, "and take this brandy out to Peacock. He's in the hall below, feeling shaky." And then he added:

"It's a bad business. Maybe when God arrives He will come as a still-born child."

"No fear," said Marshak cheerfully, taking the glass.

Leonard did fear, but he was relieved that he need not face Peacock again.

XX

Pauline

PAULINE sat on the top step, near Evelyn's door, listening for sounds she didn't want to hear. Beside her sat Leonard. There was a restfulness about him that soothed and eased her, and yet she knew that a word from her would change him to a stormy fiery creature she had never seen. Almost she was ready to speak the word.

She leaned against his shoulder wearily. He did not stir. Her tired posture was not the word.

"Oh, my dear," she murmured, "can you play Atlas?"

His hands, clasped about one tweed knee, tightened their hold. But that wasn't the word, yet. . . .

"No," he said, gently. "Every one has to do that for himself. Sometimes," he added, after a short pause, "it breaks one."

"Yes," said Pauline, not so much in assent, as to sustain, with a syllable, their strange, difficult, precious communion.

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Below-stairs, the music had ceased. The only noises were the rumble and hoot of taxis driving up and away with loads of departing guests, a thin mutter of good-bys, rather suspected than heard. And, in the room beyond, the muffled voice of inarticulate pain.

It seemed to Pauline, as she sat there, that the fevers of the night behind her were lying in the well of darkness railed off by the banisters. Their miasma drifted up to her. She pressed closer to Leonard, so as not to breathe them.

"Do you suppose," she asked, "that anything can really happen? . . ."

"Audrey?" asked Leonard.

"I'd forgotten Audrey," said Pauline, with a melancholy chuckle. "I was thinking of . . ." But of what had she been thinking? Evelyn? Max and Simone? Herself and Leonard? And what about Audrey?

"What about Audrey?"

"I don't know," said Leonard. "If she were my sister, I wouldn't care to see her ride off with a man like Gambel on a giddy night like this. She's too young. Too greedy for life. And he's greedy,

Pauline

too—for youth, I suppose. You can't trust either of them. Poor things," he said.

"But that would be terrible," said Pauline. "I mean, by daylight, if anything has happened to the child, I'll think it's terrible. Just now—why, I can't. Something gets in the way of my feeling anything too much."

"I know," said Leonard, unclasping his hands to put a brotherly arm about her.

"I'd like," said Pauline, "to run away."

For a second she feared that was the word he had been waiting for, but his quiet question reassured her:

"But where to?"

"Yes," she sighed. "Where to?"

"You'd always," he said, "be taking yourself along." He stopped for a minute. There was a deprecating smile in his tone when he went on:

"I sound like Marcus Aurelius. But you see, Pauline, I've been there. You run and you run, and you're always running in a circle, back to yourself again, and your eternal problem. It's not as if you could run to the knees of some god and be caught up into his mercy." He stopped again.

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"When you're little it's all right," volunteered Pauline. She was thinking not of her own babyhood so much as of Jimmy. "Then your mother's like God. And when you're young and in love . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Maxwell. Had he been her god, ever? Hadn't she always known him for human, all too human? She hadn't worshiped him, had she? But that didn't matter. She needed him, more desperately perhaps than if she had given him worship—needed him as a mother needs her beloved, hard-hearted child. If she could run away from that need of him. . . .

"You can divide men into two classes," said Leonard, "those who have found something to live by, and those who haven't. Of course, any general statement like that is a half-truth, but you see what I'm driving at. Take this party, to-night. You could split up your guests into those divisions almost perfectly. That was why it was a bad party, Paulinechen, because you mixed the ones who've found—something—and the ones who've stopped looking. They can't get on together. They can't cry at the same tragedies or laugh at the same jokes. That's"—his voice lowered and went

Pauline

harsh—"that's the trouble with you and"—he stammered again—"M-Maxwell."

Pauline lifted her head from his shoulder and moved quietly out of his embrace.

"What is?" she asked. Was she really going to find out, at last? And—from Leonard?

"Don't you see?" He was impatient. "You've been living all these years in a spiritual vacuum, and the ache of it is driving you into—this. . . . It's different with Maxwell. He's tired. He's willing, even if it hurts sometimes, hurts like hell, too—he's willing to go on this way until he dies."

"Oh," cried Pauline, "no!" She couldn't hear the word "die" coupled with Max's name, not when she was sick and frightened as to-night.

Leonard, not understanding her "No," went on: "That's why he plays around with men like Gambel. And that's why he's wild when Gambel runs off with his sister. D'you think if he had something to stick to, he'd blur up the void with drunken parties? D'you think he'd be so everlastingly afraid? Nothing can really happen to Audrey. Nothing can hurt you but yourself. And you can only hurt yourself with a lie."

"Marcus Aurelius!" she taunted him.

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"You're laughing at me because you don't want me to know I've stung you," he retorted.

"'Nothing,'" she quoted slyly, "'can hurt you but yourself.'"

"Oh," he said, "well . . ."

"Go on," said Pauline, in another voice. "I'd like to know what you're driving at."

"You weren't like this five years ago," said Leonard. "You were heading somewhere. You could have something to hold on to now, if you weren't Mrs. Maxwell Peacock. You'll never have a truth to cover your nakedness with, if you don't start being Pauline again, soon."

"Is this feminism you're preaching at me, or divorce?" she asked. She had lost interest. Leonard wasn't going to explain anything. He was just feeding his jealousy.

"I'm not preaching anything," he said after a minute. "I'm looking—looking for you. You were a person once. You—before I knew I loved you. And now that I know it, I can't find you. You had something once—something that made you whole and alive. Sometimes, Pauline, I think I hate you."

"Sometimes, Leonard," she said, "I hate myself. But there's no use loving me, you know."

Pauline

"If I could find you, the real you—there would be."

It seemed to her that he was piling darkness upon darkness over her heart. For a few minutes she had thought he was going to illuminate her blind struggle, going to put her right with herself, and so, automatically, with Max, too—even right with Leonard, right with all her world. Now she was lost again in a blackness that throbbed with fear and uncertainty and pain.

"Come," said Leonard, more gently, "try to see. Everybody has his own kind of reality, his own way of worshiping it, just as everybody has his own way of sneezing, of chewing his food. The nearest I ever get to godliness is when I'm trying to write. Then I'm clean of everything—stripped—looking for the word . . . 'And the Word was God': that's dead earnest, where I'm concerned. Well, you don't get at it the same way. Maybe you get it when you're reading law. Maybe when you're playing with Jimmy. Maybe when . . ." he seemed to swallow a phrase before he continued: "I don't know, because I've lost you. But Max, people like Max, like Gambel, like most of the crowd you had here to-night, haven't got

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anything. It's not that they don't want it. It's that they didn't take it when it was there for the taking, and ever since, they've tried to hide their want by pretending it wasn't there."

"Everybody can't be an artist," said Pauline. It was as though her words were a shield between Max and Leonard.

"Nobody needs to be. I'm not talking about escaping life, I'm talking about accepting it, realizing it. You can be perfectly alive lying on a hot rock under the sun with nothing around you but the dance of insects and the blue silence of summer and nothing in your mind but the odors of the grass and the stream of light that seems to be a speech in which you are a mere syllable. You can be alive when you're alone in a room you don't see because you're so busy juggling ideas. Love can make you alive sometimes. Any point of intensest consciousness. Pain, even. . . . We're alive, now, Pauline—Pauline. . . ."

It was true. The night was torn away. Her life—the life that was one helpless compromise after another, the daily wearinesses of the flesh, the daily frettings of the spirit, the woolly tangle of "shall I?" and "don't!" and "ought," and "must not,"

Pauline

was unraveled; the house and the party, Max and Jimmy, work and the world, slipped from her like a sloughed-off garment, and she was sitting with Leonard at the head of the stairs as she might have sat with her dearest comrade on the rim of an escarpment overlooking the glory of the earth.

She turned to him. And, as she faced him, she was caught away from this moment by a sudden moaning scream, by a flashing vision of Evelyn in the room with the shut door, and then the thread of a cry.

"Oh," she whispered, "it's born."

"The little God," said Leonard. But she didn't understand him.

She had been snatched back from the false peace he had seemed to offer her, into a miracle that was an aureole above the sordid night. In a moment the door would open, the doctor would come out, there would be the need for doing something, for being alert and practical and on the scene again. But for a few seconds she could breathe this thin bright air, could stand above the edged fragments of empty hours as above a glass shattered by a tone of music.

It wasn't the doctor who came out first. It was

In Such a Night

Will Mayne. He almost stumbled over them. Pauline stood up. Leonard stood up.

"Will?" She had forgotten until she saw him that Evelyn was in danger.

"It's all right," he said hoarsely.

"The baby?"

"It's all right," he said again. "It's a girl. Evey has a daughter."

Pauline chuckled then.

"And you—haven't you a daughter?"

"I have! I tell you, Pauline, Evey's a wonder. Grimm said so, too. I don't know another woman who could have worked like that. . . . She's a wonder! And it's all right. The baby's perfect. She's not so red, either, or wizened, as most of them. You can go in, I guess, in a minute, and see her. I came out because I had to tell somebody or explode. She's tiny. She'll probably be one of those bisque-doll little girls. Delicate, with lots of curls. She has quite a lot of hair, for a baby. D'you know the first thing she did when she was born? She sneezed!" He paused over that, appreciatively.

"Felicitations," said Leonard.

Pauline had forgotten Leonard. She had been thinking of Jimmy. His first hour. And Max. Had

Pauline

Max been like this, too? Had he called her a wonder? A second ago there had been a miracle. Will Mayne was dissipating it with his quick excited words. Was he glad it was a girl? And Evelyn? Leonard, with his stiff "Felicitations." . . . But he couldn't understand. Not truly. She wanted Max.

The door opened again. It was the doctor. A bald burly sort of man, with a grizzled beard that ran all the way up his red-veined cheeks. He came out, rubbing his hands on a towel. He tossed his bald head toward the room where Evelyn lay.

"You can go in now," he said to Will. "If we could have some more boiling water?" he asked Pauline.

"Of course."

She could have wept. She was back again in the rôle of helpful matron. She must go down to the kitchen. She must tell Martha. She must get some fresh sheets. She must think about breakfast, and coffee for the doctor. For two separate moments she had been alive, by Leonard's definition. Once, when he had leaned toward her, calling her name. Again, when she had heard that first small cry.

In Such a Night

Now she must put life aside for the common business of living.

On the landing she stopped. Turned back. Ran, for a respite, to Jimmy.

In the street-lamp-checquered room she noticed, surprised, a dark huddle beside the crib. Max? She tiptoed over, painful joy beating in her throat.

The figure kneeling there stirred, stumbled to its feet.

"Ja, ja, hier am I." It was Martha.

"Oh." Pauline recovered herself. "Martha, Mrs. Mayne has a little girl."

"Ye-es?"

"Yes," said Pauline. "We're all very happy. Will you please boil three more kettles of water, and get some coffee. I'll be down in a minute. Jimmy's all right?"

"Sure," said Martha. "Ach, that's fine!" She went out.

Pauline bent over Jimmy. He was sound asleep, one fat fist clutching Bambo's woolen leg.

Why hadn't it been Max, instead of Martha, here with him?

She straightened. She waited. Would he, perhaps, come, even yet?

Pauline

Someone stood in the doorway. She turned.
Max?

"Evey says she can see you for a second. And you can see the baby." It was Will Mayne.

"Oh, yes. Right away."

"In the morning," he said proudly, "we'll have to present your son to my daughter."

"Yes, indeed." She moved toward the door.

"I say, did Jimmy sneeze when he was born?"

"I don't remember," Pauline lied. "You'll have to ask Max." His name brought him nearer.

She moved more rapidly across the hall to share what remained of the miracle.

XXI

Leonard

NOBODY else seemed to hear the telephone ringing-ring-ring-ring steadily in the lower hall. So Leonard took the receiver off the hook. He hoped this was not one more crisis to meet. It seemed to him, tired as he was, that a telephone call shortly before dawn might just possibly be unimportant.

"Hello,"—a girl's voice, sweet-shrill.

"Hello."

"Max?"

"No," said Leonard.

"Oh!" She was evidently disappointed.

"Perhaps I can take the message?" He was sure he couldn't. But then, he couldn't fetch Peacock; that would be asking too much of him just now. He supposed he would have to.

"Will you *surely*?"

"Surely."

"Well, then, tell him—tell him that— This is his sister, Audrey."

Leonard

Leonard thought of Pauline, on the stairs: "By daylight, if anything has happened to the child, I'll think it's terrible. Just now—I can't." It isn't daylight yet, Leonard considered. But why should she telephone if she were safe? He ought to feel panicky. Or sorry. He ought to feel something. But perhaps it was better not to feel, in a case like this. Perhaps it was better never to feel.

He must have said something, for he heard angry protest in the words that next came over the wires:

"Of course I'm all right!"

"Would you mind," asked Leonard gently, "telling me where you are?"

"I'm at home," said Max's sister Audrey. "And would you mind telling me why he wanted me to call him the second I got here? And why I found a reception committee made up of the whole family when I did? And would you mind telling him that he's not his sister's keeper?" And then suddenly her shrill rage was spent and there was a queer noise that must mean she was crying, and then there was nothing. She had hung up.

Poor little Audrey. Was she crying because something had happened? Or because nothing had

In Such a Night

happened? Leonard would never know. No one would know. Was there anything more pathetic than young folly? Except, perhaps, gray wisdom? He turned away.

Max was standing in the foyer, a jaded Maxwell, smiling his best smile. About him a flutter of women in their cloaks, and men with possessive hands on the arms of their wives.

"You ought," Max was saying jovially, "every last one of you, to stay long enough to toast the Life of the Party—Mrs. Mayne's ten-minute-old daughter."

There was a flourish of "oh's" and "ah's" and "really's." A woman's voice said weakly: "Well, of all . . ." And a man's voice boomed: "One born every second." Leonard wanted to sweep them out of the house with a stiff broom. He looked about for someone to tell about Audrey's message for her brother. Simone Remey? She was standing, tall and straight, but with her golden gleaminess veiled in a silver-gray wrap. And the vigorous self-assurance that had streamed from her early in the evening seemed somehow veiled, too. Leonard edged toward her.

"Oh, Miss Remey."

Leonard

The face she turned toward him was as hard as ever, under the surface graciousness of her smile. The eyes, he thought, glittered with an enmity he could not fathom. He challenged it, wearily.

"It would be awfully kind of you," he said, "if you would give Mr. Peacock a message—from his sister, Audrey. She just 'phoned to say she had arrived home safely, and she would like him to know. . . ."

"'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?'" asked Simone Remey in an amused voice.

"You'll excuse me," said Leonard, "I'm just leaving. . . . And our—our host has gone for another round of drinks. . . ."

It was true. Maxwell had departed for the toasts. But Leonard hadn't known that when he approached Miss Remey. He had simply tried to avoid delivering the message himself.

"Aren't you going to drink to the Life of the Party?" asked Simone.

Leonard shook his head.

"There's always one bad fairy," he said hastily, "whose wishes bring only ill luck. And to-night I'm the one. So I'd better be going."

She let him go.

In Such a Night

"You won't forget Audrey?" he asked once more.

"I won't forget Audrey," Simone promised. There was laughter in her voice. And something like malice that Leonard didn't understand.

He thought how little of it all he understood. Simone, Audrey, Gambel, drunken Tommy Lucas, Will Mayne intoxicated with pride and relief, Max, Pauline. . . .

Pauline.

When he had hesitated, so many hours ago, as to whether he should come to-night or remain alone with himself, had he suspected that if he came it would be for the last time? Ends—are they harder than beginnings? But that is the essence of the trouble with ends: that they mean new beginnings. He must begin now to live without Pauline—he who had never truly lived with her.

So much to happen in one night. A child born. A child—the child that had been Audrey,—killed? And he, Perseus, trying to rescue his Andromeda, had only succeeded in turning her to stone. Another subject for Jacob's satiric pencil.

Hunching into his overcoat, tangled in a ravel of thoughts, he had forgotten the crowd in the

Leonard

foyer. He heard with a chilled surprise the sound of their laughter, glasses clinking, and a few voices lifted in "For she's a jolly good fellow, she's a jolly good fellow, she's a jolly good fellow, as every one will agree!" And then, more chilling yet, Max calling out, "Hi, there! Who's going without a drink? There's an extra glass here. . . ." It was intended for him, that summons. Peacock hadn't recognized him. If only he could escape. . . .

He couldn't.

It was Marshak, his blue eyes twinkling with naïve good will, who pushed the glass into his hand.

Leonard turned. As the faces of the crowd danced in his dizzy eyes, it seemed to him that the little knot of hilarious guests was transformed once more into the group created by the painter's imagination: these women in their soft capes, these men with their shining shirt-fronts and blank faces, were a troupe of wretched mimes, with masks and painted grins. They were all held by fear as in a vise, and held as in a vise by the need to hide their fear from one another. They were posturing like clowns, because they did not know how to behave

In Such a Night

in the presence of a miracle. They were the dead, chortling as they throttled the living. But, no, they were mindless, they were pitiful—they were broken marionettes, jigging as though they were whole.

He raised his glass:

“I give you,” he said, “confusion to the impotent, destruction to the safe, impoverishment to the shrewd; that each may have his just deserts, to the glory of God and the exaltation of His handiwork!” And he drank.

They hadn’t understood him, but a few drank with him. One of the men muttered, “He’s a bit elevated, what!” He saw Simone Remey watching him with narrowed eyes, and felt Marshak’s steadying hand on his shoulder.

He didn’t need steadying. He was soberer than he had ever been in his life.

Then a woman’s voice said querulously, “What an awful thing to wish on a poor little baby!” and Leonard began to laugh. He went on laughing, a soundless, mirthless laugh, until he caught sight of someone in a red dress on the top landing. He was cut off from her by the departing guests, by the intervening figure of Maxwell, by Marshak’s

Leonard

detaining hand. He was cut off from her by her compassionate indifference. He must go. He could not go while she was speaking. What was she saying?

“Good-by, good-by. . . . So good of you to come. Good-by. She’s doing beautifully. Good-by. Shall we see you soon? Good-by, good-by, good-by. . . .”

“Well, Jake, your ‘Mary’ has been delivered of a girl. But women won’t save the world, do you think?”

Out in the clarifying freshness of the dawn air, with the sky coming almost blue above the park, and the arc-lights paling under the touch of morning, Leonard covered his ache with eager words. This burgeoning light, this small wind, these friendly empty streets, were more of a pang than the tawdriness from which he had just emerged.

“Women,” Marshak repeated in a meditative voice. . . . “Don’t mind them,” he said. “They are angels—and fools.”

“In which category does Lilith belong?” asked Leonard.

In Such a Night

"With the fools," said Marshak shortly.

They strode along in step for two blocks, both silent. Leonard was trying to put himself back into the hour before he had set out for Pauline's.

He had had the choice of going to her or staying away. If he had not gone? If this too-eager daylight looking into his room found him lying abed, after a night that had ignored Pauline and her party, would he be resenting its peering eyes? Now, when he reached home, he would come burdened with barren gifts. He would set them up on his mantelpiece as if they were trophies—or booby-prizes. He would carry with him through the day the heaviness of his loss, his mouth would be dry with the coppery taste of frustration, wherever he went he would hear loneliness sniffing at his heels. If he had not gone. . . . His peace would perhaps be unmended, but certainly it would not be the ragged thing in which he now shudderingly moved. But if he had not gone, nothing else would be changed. Pauline—she would be the same Pauline—his coming had not altered her. Audrey—his presence had not saved her. Evelyn Mayne—he had attended her mystery, not assisted

Leonard

in its performance. He had had his choice of going or staying away, and he had made his choice, in vain.

What was it he had told Pauline? "Everybody has his own kind of reality. . . . Love can make you alive—any point of intense consciousness—pain. . . ." This pain he was suffering, this was real. This was, queerly, life. Nothing else matters. Nothing? He would never touch reality with Pauline's fingers again. But possibly she didn't even recognize it where he felt it most clearly. For a moment on the stairs he had thought . . .

"One oughtn't to think, Jake," he said to the painter suddenly, in a voice less harsh for being low.

Marshak glanced down at him, shading the pity in his eyes with good-humored scorn.

"So?" he said.

"It's a kind of poison: thought," said Leonard, slowly. "It makes men mad." He paused.

It was almost full daylight now. The sky was blue. A wagon rattled lonesomely over the street. The thin, caged trees lining the pavement stirred, as though restless with morning.

"All those people at the party," Leonard went

In Such a Night

on, "all those people in your picture—they do what they do because they don't want to go mad, thinking. The stupidest act keeps you sane." He paused again. "But it's queer, you know, Jake—action itself is pure insanity."

The huge painter striding along beside him made no answer. Leonard wondered what incubus he was silently exorcising. Perhaps none. He was an artist. He could be his own savior. As long as he had money for oils and canvas, he would have no need of philosophy. Sufficient to the artist's corner of chaos is his arrangement thereof.

He was having an exhibition to-morrow—no, to-day. Centuries ago, a few hours ago, he had invited Leonard to see it. The invitation had been an irrelevant reply to some query. Leonard remembered suddenly the whole scene. He asked again—was it of Marshak, of the lost night, of the impenetrable day?—he asked:

"What shall we do to be saved?"

* *

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